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RITUAL YEAR IN BULGARIA AND RUSSIA: TRADITIONS AND MODERNITY

1. Introduction. The aim of my presentation is to outline in a comparative light the changes in the ritual years of Bulgaria and Russia. After the break-up of the socialist camp and the Soviet Union, especially during the last 10-20 years, the official calendars of the two countries are subject to permanent modifications: restructuring, restoring, renaming, re-inventing and inventing.

I will focus on the major trends in the changes of both public and popular rituals during the year, and trace the reasons for that. To illustrate these processes I will analyze several Bulgarian and Russian cases of celebrating holidays, their meaning and interpretation by the government and the people. In this talk I will also touch upon the ritual year in the light of the anthropology of tourism, as festivals are an important means for attracting visitors and at the same time for constituting local brands in Russian and Bulgarian cities and villages.

2. The importance of the notion of time, calendar and particularly the notion of festive time for a state, for its citizens and for every person. The set of holidays celebrated in a country tells us a lot about its political system, the attitude towards history and religion and the hierarchy of values. Each era, each drastic historical change generate a specific notion of time and a new ritual year. One of the first Soviet Decrees, published in February, 1918 aimed at conformity with the European calendar, while the Russian Orthodox Church kept the Julian calendar. After 1989, Russia, Bulgaria and all the former socialist countries initiated the process of giving-up the ideological ritual year and designing a new pattern.

3. In Bulgaria and Russia, the major tendencies of constructing new semiotic systems of festive time are **similar** as they are aimed at constructing new state ideology and new identity, new patriotism, at integration into the open globalised world; they have to meet the challenge of the new developments and technology; they also have to suit all the generations. Still, there are many **differences** in seemingly similar systems of Russia and Bulgaria.

4. Ritual Year in socialist Bulgaria

4.1. State holidays (days-off)

January 1, 2 – New Year

March 3 – Liberation Day (1878)

May 1 – International Worker’s Day

May 24 – Day of Bulgarian education and culture and Slavonic alphabet

September 9, 10 – Day of the Socialist Revolution

4.2. Socialist red-letter days

March 8 – International Women Day

April 12 – Cosmonaut’s Day

May 9 – Victory Day

November 7 – Day of October Socialist Revolution

4.3. Other (selected)

January 19 – Day of Obstetrics (Midwife Day)

February 14 – Winegrower Day (St Trifon Day, the Guardian of the vineyards)

March 1 – Spring Day (Baba Marta)

May 6 – Livestock Farmer Day (St George Day)

June, 3 – Day of martyrs in the struggle against Ottoman yoke, fascism and capitalism (Khristo Botev Day)

December 8 – Students’ Day

5. The Soviet calendar of the 1980s

5.1. State holidays (days-off)

January 1, 2 – New Year

February 23 – Soviet Army and the Navy Day

March 8 – International Women Day

May 1 – International Worker’s Day

May 9 – Victory Day

November 7 – Day of October Socialist Revolution

5.2. Red-lettered days (selected)

April 12 – Cosmonaut’s Day

April 22 – Vladimir I. Lenin’s birthday

May 19 – Pioneers’ Day

June 22 – Beginning of WW2

6. Calendars of 2013

6.1. The Bulgarian State Festive Calendar

January, 1, 2 – New Year

March, 3 – Liberation Day

May 5 (2013) – Easter

May 1 – International day of Labour

May 7 – St George Day

May 24 – St Cyril and Methodius Day

September, 6 – Unification Day

September 22 – Independence Day

December, 24, 25 – Christmas

6.2. The Russian State Festive Calendar 2013

January, 1 – New Year
 January 2-6 – New Year Vacations
 January 7 – Russian Orthodox Christmas
 February 23 – Defender of the Fatherland Day
 March 8 – International Women Day
 May 1 – Spring and Labour Day
 May 2-5 – May Vacations
 June 12 – Day of Russia (“Independence” Day)
 November 4 – Day of People Unity (Day of Reconciliation and Consent)

7. Major Aims, Strategy and Tactics in Constructing of the Ritual Years

- ❖ To revive some of the pre-revolutionary (1917, 1944) celebrations
- ❖ To give a new appraisal of the Christian Orthodox festivals
- ❖ To correct the existing Soviet (socialist) celebrations, leaving the same date but renaming the holiday
- ❖ To choose a date close to the Soviet (socialist) holiday, finding a new historical reason for that
- ❖ To introduce a new celebration with a new date
- ❖ To follow the European and the world systems of the festivities
- ❖ Last but not least – to promote the commercial part of the festival year

8. Case studies

8.1. June, 12 – Day of Russia

8.2. November, 4 – Day of People’s Unity

8.3. July 8 – Day of Family, Love and Fidelity

8.4. January 7 – Epiphany

8.5 Russian holidays and domestic tourism: Shrovetide

9. Bulgarian Holidays and domestic tourism

8.1. The First of March – *Martenitsa*

8.2. Palm Sunday – *Tsvetnitsa*

8.3. Bulgarian local festivals and tourism

10. **Conclusion.** After a brief analysis of the Bulgarian and Russian (Soviet) ritual years, I would like to stress **the dynamics** of modern constructing of the new holidays compared to the stagnation and constancy of the festive calendars during the socialist times. Both countries are still searching for their national identity, “Rusianness” and “Bulgarianness”, and for a national idea which would unify the people and make them believe in it and support it.

December 2011 in Russia and May 2012 in Bulgaria marked a new stage in the development of the countries. The growth of oppositional movements and anti-governmental activity, the revitalization of the civil and patriotic values brought in new ideas about the nation, its history and the future. The latest events will add yet a new dimensions to both ritual calendars.

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