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*Published in:*  
Journal of Religion in Europe

Published: 01/01/2020

*Document Version*  
Accepted author manuscript

*Document License*  
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[Link to publication](#)

*Please cite the original version:*  
Hadzibulic, S., & Lagerspetz, M. (2020). New Rituals Out of an Old One: The Slava among Serbian Immigrants in Sweden. *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 13(1-2), 23-44. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe202201147922>

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# **New Rituals Out of an Old: The Slava among Serbian Immigrants in Sweden**

## **Abstract**

*Slava* or *krsna slava* is the Serbian Orthodox celebration of a family's Patron Saint on a given day of the year. During the decades of Socialist Yugoslavia (1943-1992), it was confined to the private sphere only. Since the 1960s, there is a sizeable group of Yugoslav or Serbian immigrants in Sweden, and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sweden claims 40 000 members. The article is based on 11 semi-structured interviews with immigrants who have started celebrating the Slava in Sweden. We identified four frames of interpretation used in order to provide the ritual with meaning: Orthodoxy, family, ethnicity and local community. A closer discussion of three cases illustrates different ways of finding a balance between Slava's possible meanings. The ways of celebrating display individual variation and varying influence of the culture and values of the host society.

**Key words:** Slava, Orthodoxy, migration, Serbs, Sweden, religious ritual

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Religious rituals are commonly understood as a standardized set of practices in order to perform a religious belief in a particular situation. They appear in many forms but can be viewed in terms of structure (appearance, use of space, participants performing, and method of performance), functions (results), processes (underlying behaviours perpetuating ritual action), and individual and group experience (McCollum 2019: 1832-1833). Often, religious rituals are tied to and overlap with religious holidays, as such holidays provide occasions for celebration (Polak 2019: 479). In addition to descriptions or analyses of *how* a certain ritual is performed, another set of questions is concerned with, *why*? On a psychological level, a ritual (and not only a religious one) caters among other things for the individual's need for continuity, order and security; but it receives its meaning through its embeddedness in a wider system of significant symbols (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1991, 174-5; Geertz 1973, 48). We tend to think of religious rituals and celebrations in connection with tradition, consistency and repetition. However, similarly with other cultural phenomena, rituals are able to survive their original context; in a new social and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on fieldwork that Author 1 conducted over two years (2017-2019) at the Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre (CRS) at Uppsala University. The project was part of the ten year-long multidisciplinary research programme Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy (IMPACT) at Uppsala University in Sweden. Author 2 contributed to the theoretical discussion and analysis.

environment, they are open for change and adjustment. Even more than the activities performed, this concerns their symbolic content. As a result, old rituals 'in a sense, become new rituals' (Raud 2016: 19). Religious rituals are no mere performances or representations of something, but they also shape and reproduce the very forces they represent (Durkheim referred to this as 'causal efficacy'; see Rawls 1996, 447). In the case to be discussed in this article, a Serbian Orthodox religious celebration called the *Slava*, the ritual re-establishes a bond with a Saint and with the currently living and deceased members of an extended family. Finally, a ritual can become a gateway to religious faith, verifying and generating religion's significant position in one's life. '[M]en attain their faith as they perform it' (Geertz 1973, 114).

As the social and cultural environment change, so do also the meaning and the ways in which a ritual is performed. Here, migration is a specific case which includes a total change of an individual's environment; of their geographic location, social circumstances, social relations as well as many cultural habits. In such a situation, people tend to 'mobilize rituals in order to gain and reaffirm a sense of self and identity' (Soeffner & Zifonum 2016: 8; cf. Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966, 174-5).

This paper focuses on such processes among Serbian immigrants in Sweden. The Serbian/Yugoslav immigration to Sweden had its start in the 1950s and 1960s. Until 1972, the Swedish industry was actively recruiting labour force mainly from Finland, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. Soon after that, a growing number of refugees started to arrive from conflict-ridden sites in Latin America and the Middle East. A coordinated immigration policy was adopted by the Parliament in 1975 (Westin 2008: 42-3). The guiding policy principles were formulated as 'equality, freedom of choice and co-operation' (Benito 2007, 336). In this context, 'freedom of choice' meant that the state distanced itself from assimilationist policies, wishing to guarantee every individual 'a freedom of identity'. The multiculturalist approach has survived in Swedish integration policy, which includes measures of support for different ethnic cultures and religious practices (Benito 2007, 341-4).

At the same time, the identity of an individual immigrant changes over time; even more, that of the second generation. The individual may actively strive for assimilation, or actively work for the preservation of his or her cultural heritage. In both cases, however, a modicum of both the majority's culture and values, and of those inherited (and possibly those of other immigrants with

similar experiences) will continue to influence his or her identity; some researchers use the terms of hybridity and *bricolage* (Westin 2008: 47).

The *slava* or *krsna slava* (Ser. celebration or christened celebration) is the annual celebration of a family's Patron Saint. It consists of a ritual followed by a celebration feast, and is common only among Orthodox Serbs.<sup>2</sup> We will describe and analyse how Slava is celebrated in Sweden. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with Slava hosts. In addition, one of the Slavass was visited and several private photos of Slava celebrations were received. The total number of research interviews was 11, but we selected three of them for closer discussion in this paper. However, the wider data set of 11 serves as a background for our interpretation of the selected cases.

In what follows, we will first give an overview of the history of Serbian migration in Sweden and, in relation to that, the establishment and development of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Four additional expert interviews with functionaries of the local Serbian Orthodox Church were conducted for background information (see References). A presentation of the Slava's key features will follow. After that, the interviews will be described and analysed with specific focus on three cases and finally, discussed in the conclusion part.

### **Serbian immigrants and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sweden**

Due to their varying citizenship status, it is difficult to estimate the number of Serbian immigrants in Sweden. However, according to official Serbian statistics from 2010 (*Migracioni profil...* 2011), the first, second and third generation of Serbian immigrants in Sweden include around 75 000 people. The latest statistics available (*Migracioni profil...* 2017) show that 1 598 Serbs arrived in Sweden in 2016. The immigration of Serbs and people of other nationalities from former Yugoslavia to Sweden has taken place in two waves. The first one started in the 1950s and was basically labour related, while the second took place in early 1990s, when the Yugoslav civil wars forced many people to leave their homes. According to Martens (1997), Sweden hosted almost 70 000 refugees from Yugoslavia in 1992. During the 2000s, immigration has continued from what

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, Orthodox Vlachs and a number of Montenegrins celebrate the Slava, but the ritual originates from the Serbian Orthodox tradition and is recognized as such among the other ethnic groups.

now is Serbia, family unification being now the most usual reason (Statistikmyndigheten 2020). Today, Sweden has one of the world's largest immigrant communities from former Yugoslavia; the second largest foreign-born population in Sweden after those born in Finland (Hall 2013: 22). The major waves of migration are also reflected in the establishment and development of the Serbian Orthodox Church's activities in Sweden.

The first wave of migration coincided with economic crises in then socialist Yugoslavia. At the same time, there was a demand for labour force in Western European economies (Hall 2013: 21). By early 1970s, the time was ripe for the establishment of a Diasporic branch of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in Sweden. The Church's early development in Sweden was a time of obstacles with little organized support. Priests were sent from the home country in order to establish parishes and connect with Serbian immigrants. Coming from then actively anti-religious Yugoslavia, most of those immigrants had only a distant relation with organised religion. In addition, many were afraid of possible conflicts with Yugoslav authorities during their visits to the home country. Those with contacts with the church were regarded potential enemies of the political system, as explained by a priest in Gothenburg with a forty-year-long service:

As soon as they would arrive back for the holidays they would immediately be called by the police to an informative conversation, at least twice during their stay. And there were many spies here in Sweden who reported people who went to the church. They were interested in who was coming, what was happening, and what they were looking for in the church in the first place (Expert interview, Father Dragan Mijailović, 13 October 2017). [This and other interview quotations, except that of Vera (Interview 5) are translations from Serbian.]

The priests' initiative and dedicated work were of immense importance for the establishment of SOC's activities in Sweden (for more, cf. Author 1 2018; 2018b). A parish was first established in Västerås in 1972, and soon after that in Malmö (1972), Stockholm (1973) and Gothenburg (1979). By the end of the 1980s, SOC had parishes also in Jönköping and Helsingborg. Two separate Swedish speaking entities, the Eskistuna parish (*Den heliga Anna av Novgorod*) and the Swedish Deanery in Gothenburg and Kristianstad (*Svenska prosteriet*) started their regular activities in 1971 and 1976, respectively.

With the arrival of refugees in early 1990s, the population of Serbs in Sweden started again to increase rapidly. Between 1989 and 1994, the number of church members grew from 22 000 to approximately 30 000 (Arentzen 2015: 91). In 1990, the Serbian Orthodox Eparchy of Britain and Scandinavia was founded, and its centre established in Stockholm a year later. The head of the Malmö parish describes this as a crucial period in the development of the SOC in Sweden, and reminds of the more general cultural and social role that churches play for immigrant ethnic communities:

The 1990s were a turning point when we accomplished what was not possible before. [...] Our people came here in the 1960s as economic migrants and had no religious beliefs. New generations came because they had no choice, and without them many parishes would have been closed down. They were in possession of some basic religious knowledge and then, in the company of their priests, their faith grew here. This is all because churches in diaspora are not only spiritual, but also historical and cultural meeting places. [...] We see how everything has progressed within this short time - many church buildings had been purchased, monasteries established, and there are now more members as well as more activities (Expert interview, Father Milan Gardović, 10 December 2017).

Today, the SOC is an integrated part of Swedish society, including eight Serbian speaking<sup>3</sup> and three Swedish speaking parishes.<sup>4</sup> The church is economically independent, with an annual financial support from the Swedish state. It is also a member of the Christian Council of Sweden (*Sveriges kristna råd*), an organization for inter-church cooperation which also provides spiritual care in public institutions (Sveriges kristna råd 2020).

The membership of the SOC in Sweden today is mainly composed of Serbian immigrants and their descendants, both new arrivals and long-term residents. Besides, students with temporary residence and those in transit have links to the church. A number of ethnic Swedes are also associated with the church, principally due to their family relations. The total number of members is around 40 000 as estimated by the church itself.

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<sup>3</sup> The numbers as presented in the official statistics show that the largest parishes are Gothenburg with 7 607 registered members, Malmö with 4 867 and Stockholm with 3 222. However, the church representatives claim that the real number is much higher.

<sup>4</sup> According to Father Dorotej Forsner, the head of the Swedish deanery, the number of Serbian Orthodox Swedes is around 10 000 (Expert interview, Father Dorotej Forsner, 2017). They are mostly linked to the Swedish-speaking parishes but, as mentioned in the main text, some of them are to be found in other, Serbian-speaking parishes.

The SOC's priests seek to maintain close ties with the church members despite their growing number. This is especially visible in the context of Slava. One of their main duties apart from in-church activities is visiting families for the Slava holy water consecration. As stated by Father Dušan D. Raković, one of the three Stockholm priests and the Bishop vicar for Scandinavia, the number of families in Stockholm that priests annually visit in connection with the Slava is about 750-800 (Expert interview, Father Dušan D. Raković, 29 November 2019). He supposes that there are also hundreds of families who celebrate the Slava without the participation of a priest. Having in mind the relatively large number of Serbians in other large cities too, the number of families celebrating the Slava in Sweden could be between 2 000 and 2 500.

## **The Slava**

Besides Christmas and Easter, the Slava is one of the most important celebrations in the life of a Serbian Orthodox family. Other names used for this celebration are christened name (*krsno ime*), saint (*svetac*), holiday (*praznik*), holy (*sveti*), service (*služba*) and wisdom of the holy (*pamet svetom*). Within the Church tradition, the Slava is commonly comprehended as a holiday of the 'small church' consisting of any single Christian family (Bandić 1986: 18). The responsibility and honour of hosting the Slava 'is passed through male successors, and through women only in exceptional situations, and even then on behalf of the host, i.e., the male head of the family' (Vlahović 1968: 128) – that is, the oldest son inherits it from his father and passes it, in turn, to his oldest son. For some families, it is possible to trace back the Slava tradition through several generations. It is not just one of the family holidays, but a celebration devoted to a certain family (defined through a male line of succession) (Bandić 1997: 246).

However, the celebration also confirms the family's belonging to the Serbian national church (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović 2006: 78) and hereby, it becomes a way of expressing the family's ethnic identity. Some scholars date its roots back as far as to the 11th century (Vlahović 1968, 120); however, similar religious celebrations of kinship and family are known under different names in different parts of the Balkan Peninsula (Hristov 2000). It seems that specific traits of the Slava, and its association with Serbian ethnicity only started to be emphasized in the 1870s, as a part of the nation building projects of the region. In 1920s and 1930s, differences between related

traditions continued to be actively exploited as a way of cementing ethnic boundaries between Slavic peoples (ibid.).

After the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, the Slava has again become a central element in the Serbian state's nation building agenda, among other things through public celebrations by government agencies. Formerly a barely tolerated 'remnant' in the private sphere of some of the atheist state's citizens, its position has undergone a remarkable change (Author 1 & Author 2 2016). A further sign of this is its nomination and inclusion in UNESCO's *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2014).

The Serbian Orthodox tradition devotes 78 days of the year to patron saints who are celebrated with a Slava. An official theological description lists its basic elements (*Enciklopedija pravoslavlja* 2002: 1056). It always includes a prayer for consecrated Slava's boiled wheat (*slavsko žito* or *koljivo*), representing bloodless sacrifice. Other inevitable elements of the ritual are the Slava cake or bread (*slavski kolač*), the Slava candle (*slavska sveća*), sacred water, red wine to be poured over the cake, incense (*tamjan*) and oil (as a sacrifice to God). Depending on the time of the ecclesiastical year, either ham or fish will be eaten at the subsequent festive lunch.

The celebration should start at a church, where the family brings the Slava cake and the Slava wheat for consecration. An Orthodox priest takes part in the ceremony. The Slava cake is cut in the shape of the cross as a symbol of Christ's suffering. Red wine is poured over it, signifying that the family is now released of all its sins. The highlight of the ritual is the breaking of the cake, which is performed by the host with the oldest or the most important (male) guest (*dolibaša*, a close friend of the family), the host's (male) heir, and other family members. 'The importance of the host's wife can be seen in the fact that she personally prepares the Slava cake(s) and then she demonstrates her skill when making dough ornaments and richly decorating the cake(s)' – as can be read in the nomination for inscription filed with UNESCO (2014, 4) by the Serbian Republic. The ritual and the subsequent lunch, in which just the closer family circle takes part, is followed by a feast with the participation of invited guests. The feast starts by a toast presented by the host in God's and the Patron Saint's honour.

The celebration can last up to three days in a row, with new guests arriving on the second and third day. At present, Serbian law allows one paid day off from work for those celebrating the Slava of their own family; but many take more days off in order to prepare for the occasion. As the UNESCO nomination document (UNESCO 2014, 2) points out, the celebration typically

involves 'members of the extended family, neighbours, friends, and local community members'; it 'ensures the necessary integrity of the family within the community and integration within the wider community' (ibid, 5).

Certainly, both the description submitted for UNESCO and the theological presentations have a normative, standardizing character. They suppose a uniformity that might not exist in practice. For instance, Slava celebrations by, e.g., businesses or branches of municipal government, or the conspicuous Slava partying by media celebrities hardly matches those descriptions (Author 1 & Author 2 2016, 83 f.).

Notwithstanding the ceremony's explicitly religious content, it also serves functions and carries meanings far beyond that, embedded in several other contexts. Some of the most obvious are those of *the (patriarchal) extended family; the (ethnically defined) Serb nation; and the (local) community*. We could here apply the concept of interpretative framework, or *frame*. Such a frame organizes the knowledge about a concept or a social activity and decides, what is typical or characteristic, and what is negligible (Van Dijk 1981, 219). In a previous article (Author 1 & Author 2 2016) we described a change of Slava's practice and meaning that has taken place in post-Yugoslav Serbia – among other things, the resurrection of its public, nationalist celebration. That shows an instance of placing the Slava in one particular frame, that of the nation. In the empirical cases to be discussed below, all of them display some (varying) importance.

## **The Slava in Sweden**

For this study, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted during 2017 to 2019 among Serbian immigrants and their descendants in Malmö, Helsingborg, Gothenburg, Linköping, and Stockholm. Except for one interview (No. 5, Vera), which was conducted in Swedish, Serbian was used as the interviewing language. The respondents were found through the SOC in Sweden and through private networks. Most interviews were done at the respondents' homes, except one (No. 1, Milan) at the local Orthodox Church, and one (No. 2) in a local café. For one interview (No. 5, Vera), Skype was used. In three interviews, both spouses participated. The Slava hosts were asked to tell about their ways of celebrating, and about why and how they took up the tradition; typically,

one interview lasted about one hour. One celebration was visited and observed. The interviewees were also asked to deliver photos about their Slava celebration. Table 1 summarises some basic data about the interviews and the respondents; it also shows the results of an initial analysis about the interpretative frames applied by the respondents in order to provide their celebration with meaning.

***[TABLE 1 about here!]***

The overview presented in Table 1 shows the (not unexpected) dominance of *Orthodoxy* and *family* as frames of interpretation. It is also usual to additionally frame the Slava as a Serbian national celebration expressing the participants' *ethnicity*. That frame is not self-evident. As we pointed out earlier, it was explicitly introduced first in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even according to today's standardized description of the Slava feast, it 'plays an important role in the establishment and maintenance of interethnic and intercultural dialogue in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional areas' (UNESCO 2014, 5). In the Serbian/Yugoslav context of the Slava, the local community participating can be ethnically and confessionally mixed. *Community* is a fourth frame with a strong presence. At least in one important way, ethnicity and community may in practice become competitors: if guests outside the family are invited, the host must decide whether to celebrate in ethnically mixed or mono-ethnically Serbian company.

One interview clearly stands out of the crowd: that of Vera (No. 5). She is a born Swedish citizen with a Serbian father, and not a confessing Orthodox. She was found through a professional network and not through the SOC in Sweden, as were the other respondents. Even if Vera's case is atypical among the 11 interviews, it does not need to be that in the context of second-generation immigrants, of whom Vera was the only representative in our sample.

In the following, we will present three cases of private Slava celebration practice by Serbian immigrants in Sweden. With the help of those three cases, we wish to display the widest possible array of experiences, meanings and ways of adjusting (or not adjusting) the performance to the new circumstances. We, thus, follow the strategy of analytical generalization (Kvale 1996, 233); more specifically, we aim at showing the variety of patterns of adjustment, and the circumstances in which they are embedded. In all cases, the hosts have made the individual decision of taking up

or preserving the tradition even in an environment vastly different from its original context, sometimes requiring significant parts of it to be changed and adjusted.

In addition to interviews, the Stockholm Slava hosted by Nada (interview No. 10) was visited and a number of photos made. The interview No. 5 (Vera) with a Slava host in Helsingborg was carried out via Skype, and it is the only interview translated from Swedish. She also provided photos from two previous Slavass.

All the respondents, who are here referred to by invented names, were thoroughly informed about the research goals and issues. They gave their informed consent to participate in the project, likewise for a publication of the descriptions, interview quotations and pictures for purposes of research.

The descriptions are based on the field work by the first author.

### ***Interview 1: Milan***

I met Milan in Malmö where he has lived for fifty years. Now retired, Milan spent all his working life in Sweden as a qualified worker in the same factory in Lund. He grew up in an Orthodox family in Belgrade where he had a contact with the church in his childhood:

I remember that my family used to go the Church of Saint Marko and the Temple of Saint Sava because we lived in Vračar [the old part of the city where both are located]. And I really liked to go there since priests would always take us kids to a separate hall and offer cakes that women brought to the church. You enter the church and you see a hall full of plates with cakes... so lovely! [...] I had no ideas about God but I had a pleasant feeling about going to the church. Priests were really treating us nicely. That was a very nice part of my childhood.

When he left Belgrade at the age of twenty, Yugoslavia had already turned a Communist country and 'you could no more see a priest on the streets'. In the secularized environment, he lost all connection with the church but never 'went over to the other side', as he never became a member of the Communist Party. After he got married he moved to Sweden and founded a family. For years, he knew nothing about the SOC in Malmö until a Swedish colleague married to a Bosnian woman took him there:

There were about ten old ladies and five to six older men in the church. I was thirty and something and the youngest one there. First, they thought I was spying on them since that is how it was then. We had a glass of *rakija* [a type of brandy] together and they asked me where I came from. Then they cooled down and I started going there almost every week. I was not engaged in any way. I would just come to light a candle, attend the liturgy, have a coffee, and talk with people.

During the first fifteen years of life in Sweden, Milan was mostly occupied by work, acquisition of property, and family duties. Reaching their middle age, Milan and his wife finally had time for other things. Among those was a rediscovery of the Slava tradition, about which the couple previously had a vague idea only:

My primary family had a Slava. I knew nothing about it back then but I knew that there was some cake and that was interesting. And my wife's family also had a Slava. So we started celebrating a Slava here. The communism was still strong back in Yugoslavia and people there were teasing me. But I would celebrate anyway and invite people.

At the moment I met him, Milan had a very modest Slava celebration, mostly limited to his closest family members, due to health issues in the family. However, for many years Milan's family has celebrated the Slava for two days. Both Milan and his wife would always take a day off from work for the Slava as they considered it the most important family day besides Christmas. His wife would prepare the cake and food, and the rest was a joint contribution. After the cake consecration in the church, the feast would start at their home. The first day was the day for the family and close friends and the second was reserved for the neighbours:

I would always invite our neighbours on the second day. I would just put a notice on the house front door and invite them all. They were always thrilled and they would all come. We celebrated in the afternoon, after work, so that they could come over. [...] You know, my neighbours Swedes are nice people, very polite, but they never invite me to their house. I do not expect that as I know that it is a part of how they are. But I still wanted to invite them to my Slava.

In addition to this, Milan used to extend the celebration by taking some Slava food and sweets to work. The celebration would then also include his colleagues. He regards this as a way to share his happiness.

### *Interview 5: Vera*

Vera is a 39-year-old woman who lives in Helsingborg in southern Sweden. Her father is a Serb, now a retired Orthodox priest. Her mother was a Dane who had converted even before she met her father, so Vera grew up in a family practising Orthodoxy. As a teenager, she started looking for a Christian context of her own, and began singing in a youth choir in the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden. Later on, Vera attended lessons in confessional religious education. There she met her future husband and in connection with their wedding, she converted to Protestantism. As Vera puts it: 'My mom converted to Orthodoxy so I think that I, in a way, converted back'. She now works as a Protestant minister in the local Church of Sweden parish.

In her primary family, both her father's and her mother's Slava were celebrated. After she got married to a Swedish man she continued celebrating with her parents, at their parent's house. When her mother died Vera decided to start preparing the Slava cake and Slava food and celebrate at her own home:

My more active participation in the Slava started when my parents got sick. My mother died at the beginning of November and one of my last pictures of her was when she celebrated her Slava in September the same year. Although it was always my dad who made the Slava bread, in connection to this situation I started doing that instead. [Translated from Swedish]

Vera bakes the Slava cake and the Slava wheat and prepares the Slava food herself. The Slava cake is consecrated by her father at home, but she does go to the Orthodox Church on that day. Her husband and children, together with her father, participate in the celebration (see picture 1). Sometimes Vera invites her Serbian cousins but she has never had any Swedish friends visiting for the Slava because she finds the celebration to be very private and personal. Besides, she is not sure if her Swedish friends would understand what the Slava is all about.

*Picture No. 1 here - Vera's son next to the Slava cake*

The setting for Vera's Slava is intimate, centred around the cake on her kitchen table. Also the wine and a candle stand there together with an icon of St. Nicholas, her family patron saint. The

date is close to Christmas, so Vera's kitchen receives additional light from the electric Advent candles typical of the Swedish tradition.

Vera's own religious conviction does not require the celebration of a Patron Saint. It is mainly because of her father and his religious views that she celebrates the Slava. At the same time, it is her only connection to Orthodox spiritual life. She does not celebrate Orthodox Christmas or Easter. However, she does decorate her house with typical Orthodox symbols, such as dry oak tree leaves at Christmas and coloured eggs at Easter. It is on those occasions that she gets in contact with her Orthodox cousins by sending congratulations and best wishes.

According to Vera, the Slava is a tradition of her primary family, which she has now transmitted to her own family. Vera and her family know the Patron Saint they are celebrating and they know how to perform the ritual, but they have little further knowledge about the tradition or its possible meanings. Vera's husband finds it exotic and her kids like it. They cannot sing Orthodox songs, but they find it nice and important to be around the Slava cake.

### ***Interview 10: Nada***

Nada is in her late fifties and has been living in Stockholm for almost thirty years. She moved to Sweden in order to be with her husband who became a Swedish resident in the 1960s. Her husband owned a small factory in Stockholm's suburbia where they both worked. After his death, Nada continued working in the factory and living in the family house with two daughters. Besides, she is engaged in the church's internal activities and has headed the Stockholm parish church board for years. Together with other women she also helps with activities related to organizing and preparing church celebrations in the Stockholm church.

Nada always had the Slava. Her primary family used to celebrate it and this still evokes precious memories:

In my family back in Serbia it was always a big thing to celebrate the Slava. We did it no matter what the circumstances were. I still have those memories of the Slava celebration in my head, which I am very fond of. We lived in a small place and almost everyone was invited. There were family members, friends, neighbours, adults, children...everyone. It was never luxurious but we would always give our best to make it as nice as we can. [...] There was happiness, laughter, joy and a kind of feeling of belonging which was just incredible.

In Sweden, the Slava of Nada's husband became her own Slava. It was prepared and celebrated with much dedication. Both spouses would take a day off to prepare the Slava requisites, the food and, in addition to that, reorganize the house space in order to receive all guests. Their children would take part in the preparation by doing some basic cleaning work and helping with the food purchase. The Slava day would start by taking the Slava cake to the church for consecration. This was followed by the feast at home. The local priest was always present together with several other guests, mostly family members, and closest friends. Their children's friends were also invited. For Nada's family, the Slava was a very important event filled with 'the respect for the saint, the church and Orthodoxy and family values'.

After the death of Nada's husband his Slava was inherited by his son from his first marriage. Therefore, Nada decided to continue celebrating but this time by taking over her maiden Slava despite the fact that her brother does the same back in Serbia.

I wanted to have the Slava and, since my husband's son inherited it, I had no choice but to take my primary family's Slava. So my brother celebrates in Serbia and I celebrate here. We are in two different countries so I guess it is fine. It is a pity we cannot visit each other on that day but we both feel the joy of Slava in some way.

Nada prepares the Slava in a similar manner as before. Her daughters, now adults, help her with making the Slava cake, preparing the food and rearranging the home space. They consecrate the Slava cake in the church and continue the celebration at home (see Picture 2). Due to Nada's engagement in the church, all Stockholm priests are present at the celebration. The cutting the cake ritual is performed by one of them but she finds the presence of them all a unique blessing brought to her family.

*Picture No. 2 here - The cutting of cake in Nada's house*

For her Slava feast, Nada and her daughters have laid a table with a white tablecloth and crystal glasses, long enough to provide space for all the family and guests.

When talking about the Slava guests Nada holds a quite resolute stance:

I never invite Swedes to my Slava. We did not do it when my husband was alive either. That [the Slava] is our thing. I cannot invite those [Swedes] and then talk Swedish at the Slava. I need to talk Serbian. It has to feel familiar and belong to us. Swedes do not understand what the Slava is all about, it has no meaning to them. And I want to be surrounded by my people, to talk Serbian...it is my home! [...] Sometimes we sing at the Slava. It is just joy, it is our faith and someone needs to understand that.

Among the three Slava hosts presented here, Nada stands out as the most ambitious, and also as the most careful in stressing the celebration's concordance with the relevant rules.

## Conclusions

A preliminary analysis of the 11 interviews showed the basic features of Slava celebration in Sweden, and three cases were described in more depth. The three families all celebrate the Slava, but not in an identical way. Despite its supposed character of something inherited by a family, taking up the ritual was in each case an individual decision made by the Slava host him/herself. All of them were aware of the ritual's earlier presence in their family history. However, starting to host the Slava was for none of them self-evident in the way that its passing down is 'officially' described in, e.g., the nomination filed with UNESCO (2014). None of the three hosts had any *obligation* to do that. Milan started to celebrate the Slava at a time when it suited his life situation; Vera and Nada wished to take over the ritual instead of letting it die out with the male family. In the cases of the two women hosting the Slava one could say, that their doing that instead of 'the oldest male member of the family' (ibid, 4) formally amounts to a deviation from the tradition. Nada has, though, a theologically-sounding excuse for this exception from tradition: She and his brother live in different countries, so both can celebrate the common Slava.

As we stated earlier, the Slava ceremony is functional and meaningful in more than just one way. *Religion, family, ethnicity* and *local community* are the most important interpretative frames available. The three hosts have different ways of finding a balance between Slava's different possible meanings. For all of them, Slava is of course a religious ritual. While Nada, however, meticulously anchors her celebration with the Serbian Orthodox Church, Vera has constructed her Slava as a way of remembering one part of her roots; as a highly private form of 'extra-institutional

religion' (cf. Ganiel 2019, 473). For all three, it is also a family feast; but again, in ways that vary. For Vera, the Slava is exclusively about her closest family. Milan celebrates with his core family and closest friends, but also with neighbours and colleagues at work. Also Nada extends the group of invited guests outside her family, but only to ethnic Serbs.

Nada is also the one most conscious and explicit in her insistence on Slava as a Serbian national celebration. As we stated above, the ethnic frame however competes in practice with the frame of the local community. And so, for instance, Milan makes use of the occasion of bonding with neighbours and colleagues of Swedish or whatever ethnicity. We can see that the Slava is, among other things, a resource for building and reinforcing social networks and social capital – be it with neighbours and colleagues, or with co-nationals.

The three Slava hosts with the background of Serbian immigration to Sweden have found their own ways of making it a meaningful part of their lives. For all of them, it carries meanings about religion and family roots. But the balance varies between those and other interpretative frames. In addition to, and simultaneously with those meanings, the Slava can be a private spiritual practice, an occasion highlighting Serbian national and church tradition, or a way of reproducing social networks. The Slava is malleable.

While the three hosts are preserving a Serbian Orthodox tradition in Sweden, the very act of doing so is already influenced by the values of their host country: An individualism that allows the custom to be adopted by any one at will; and the gender equality, which makes the strict patrilineality in passing down the tradition to seem outdated and irrelevant. Diasporas have the reputation of conservatism in cultural issues. However, the Serbs who emigrated from the former Yugoslavia do not, in issues of religion, have a shared experience to feel nostalgic about. At the time they left for Sweden, religion and the Slava alike had for a long time been confined to the margins of society. For some of them, the Slava served as a gateway for reconnecting and staying in contact with Orthodoxy. Their relative ignorance of religious customs also allowed them to 'discover' the Slava by themselves, without strong normative pressure neither from the Church nor from the local community. The second generation of Serbs in Sweden is even more strongly exposed to cultural influences of the host society. If the Slava celebration survives, it is likely to show growing individual variation.

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## **Expert interviews**

Father Dorotej Forsner, 15 October 2017, Bredared.

Father Dragan Mijailović, 13 October 2017, Gothenburg.

Father Dušan D. Raković, 29 November 2019, Stockholm.

Father Milan Gardović, 10 December 2017, Malmö.