

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
WORKING PAPERS



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

WORKING PAPER No. 98

GALIA I. VALTCHINOVA

FROM
POSTSOCIALIST
RELIGIOUS REVIVAL
TO A SOCIALIST SEER
AND VICE VERSA:
THE REMAKING
OF RELIGION IN
POSTSOCIALIST
BULGARIA

Halle/Saale 2007
ISSN 1615-4568

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, PO Box 110351,
06017 Halle/Saale, Phone: +49 (0)345 2927-0, Fax: +49 (0)345 2927-402,
<http://www.eth.mpg.de>, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de

From Postsocialist Religious Revival to a Socialist Seer and Vice Versa: the remaking of religion in postsocialist Bulgaria¹

*Galia I. Valtchinova*²

Abstract

Ethnographies of religious revival in postsocialist Bulgaria show that, unlike what was expected – and what is generally held for true – the Orthodox Church as an institution has rarely been active in this process. In this paper, a mix of anthropological case studies and an archival study, I will argue that an actor-oriented perspective on ‘religion’, rather than a church-oriented one, is better to approach the postsocialist religious revival. Taking examples from Bulgaria, I will try to concentrate on the actors’ point of view and take into account the category of ‘popular’ religious and ritual specialists. The story of Vanga, a seer, clairvoyant, and healer, provides a telling illustration of how ‘popular’ religious specialists adapted to socialism and played a role in the subsequent religious revival.

¹ I would like to thank the reviewers Deema Kaneff and Tamar Klein for helpful comments on the paper.

² Galia Valtchinova is senior researcher at the Centre of Thracian Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia 1000, Moskovska street 13a, and associate member of the Centre d’Anthropologie Sociale in Toulouse. Phone 1: (359 2) 981 5853; Phone 2: (33 1) 4211 9686; E-mail: galiaval@tiscali.fr

Introduction: thinking about the postsocialist religious revival

The celebration of blossoming postsocialist religious life, which allegedly occurred only after decades of ‘non-religion’ or suppressed religiosity, is *de bon ton*. This dominant stance often obscures facts that counter the black-and-white view, and even careful ethnographies that attest to the opposite cannot avoid it. Anthropologists like Humphrey (1983) and Verdery (1991, 1996) were the first to show the dangers of a priori oversimplifications in the study of socialism; it was already well-established by the 1980s (Rogers 2005: 5–8) that anthropological study of religion refuted easy dichotomies by pointing out discrepancies between state discourse and socialist practices, as well as disparities between intentions, claims and reality. Well before Creed (1998) used the ‘domestication’ formula to account for the gap between discourse and practice observed in late socialist Bulgaria, the term was applied to religion (Dragadze 1993) precisely with regard to claims at the local level regarding religion and ongoing practices. The challenge to existing rigid schemes came mainly from the analysis of ritual, which was not only the domain in which transformations were most visible, but also where fine-grained pictures of the failures of state socialism to uproot religiosity were presented. Klingman’s (1988) study on the intricacies of ritual, religion, and nationalism in the everyday life of a village in socialist Romania opened the way for further valuable studies of ritual and religion. On the other hand, ritual in the religious realm is clearly connected to power and economy; studying ritual decline after the change, Creed (2002) suggested the existence of ritual expenditure in socialist Bulgaria.

Ritual activity is often represented as relatively independent from the actors: a symbolic host of relationships; an arena where power materialises and is negotiated; and a nodal point of social and political tensions that are transformable into something viable. Attentive to the local practices as it is, anthropology of socialism and postsocialism should also pay attention to the actors of religious life. The struggle over the meaning of ritual, and of ‘religiosity’ in general, was not a binary relationship between the State (‘the regime’) and the Church (*the* religious institution): it also implied the inclusion of various small groups, and individual actors. The latter were the prime targets of State pressure through ritual, but also the key players in negotiating religiosity and a specific understanding of ‘religion’ outside the formal context of the Church.

As a rule, the writings on ‘religion under communism’ are forced into a Church-oriented perspective (Chadwick 1992, Michel 1991, 1994), and this continues to be the prevailing stance even if leading sociologists of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1993; Piette 1999 among others) have suggested that this perspective is no longer an adequate lens for looking at everyday religious life in European societies today. A more subtle approach promotes anthropological categories like experience and subjectivity, which are defended in the writings of some of the most influential religious scholars, from Luckman’s *The Invisible Religion* (1967) to the recent re-reading of William James by Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (2002). In fact, this approach is the basis of Durkheim’s sociology of religion, central to which is the notion of religiosity³ in place of ‘religion’, as religiosity evokes the mental structuring of a doctrine and provides an institutional framework of worship, whereas religion is too restrictive. The relevance of this distinction is emphasised by E. Gellner (1984; cf. Shankland 2004: 32–35), and is recast in the theory of ‘modes of religiosity’ (Whitehouse 2000).

³ I use religiosity in the sense of Durkheim’s *religiosité* (which might be translated also as ‘religiousness’), the more general term he proposed as inclusive of religion *stricto sensu* and other forms of spirituality (1964: 31–34).

With regard to socialist Bulgaria, church-oriented research on religion emphasised two aspects: on one hand, the harsh treatment of clergy and a parallel repression of religiosity, which included imposing ‘atheism’ on believers; and on the other hand, the preservation of the institution and its manipulations by the regime for nationalist goals. Both being correct, they obscure less visible developments that have surfaced with the recent religious revival (acknowledged by Benovska 1993, Creed 2002; Kaneff 2002 among others). Identifying these developments in Orthodox Bulgaria⁴, which is the central task of this paper, is only possible by adopting an actor-oriented perspective. Starting with postsocialist religious life, I will trace them back, moving between events during socialism and latter developments, thereby replacing the perspective of revival after a ‘religious vacuum’ (which is dependent on the freezing theory) with a more complex and dynamic understanding of the postsocialist religious boom, which resulted, among others things, from profound alterations of ‘religion’ under the pressure of power and ‘knowledge’ during socialism.

1. Approaching ‘Religious Revival’ in Postsocialist Bulgaria

1.1. *Doing Fieldwork on ‘Religion’ in Postsocialism: a preliminary note*

The case studies presented hereafter are grounded on ethnographies produced over ten years by a ‘native’ ethnologist educated in Bulgaria. This footnote implies the need for a few explanations about the approaches and research methods used. First of all, I tried to maintain distance from the traditional methods of conducting fieldwork in Bulgarian (as in most East European) ethnologies and folklore studies⁵. Fieldwork was conducted independently from a team, and not done in accordance with the logic of a Ph.D. thesis, nor as part of a planned collective work. Except in the first case study reported in 1.2. (which was the subject of an earlier book), all case studies were conceived as parts of a lengthy research project on postsocialist religiosity coordinated through small individual grants. Even though stays were short, efforts were made at each location for the deepest possible immersion into the local context. The brief research periods – from one day to two weeks at a time – contrast sharply with the basic requirements for fieldwork in the English-American anthropological tradition. Among the various reasons for this were the institutional constraints and the volatile logic of sponsorship for field research in former socialist countries, as well as the more serious need for distance because of the ‘estrangement’ of the native ethnographer from a ‘field’ which is too closely associated with his own cultural background. Thus, for me, leaving the field site shortly after the ‘first contact’, and then returning weeks later for longer stays (of intervals up to several months), was the best way to maintain the fragile equilibrium between the insider’s empathy and the scholar’s necessary critical thinking. Moreover, the nature of some religious phenomena being studied made longer stays more difficult to sustain; whereas a longer stay was helpful for understanding the mechanisms of parish revival, it was less appropriate for studying pilgrimage⁶. Thus my leading concern was balancing participation in and observation of the small events that made up the larger ‘religious life’, since studying processes usually began by

⁴ Here ‘Orthodox Bulgaria’ denotes a) the fact that Orthodoxy is officially recognised as the dominant and traditional confession in Bulgaria, and enjoys State support; b) the local communities whose population identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, or ‘Christian because Bulgarian’; c) the actors of religious life in Bulgaria that see themselves as ‘truly Orthodox’ Christian believers. Similar developments are observed also with regard to other confessions.

⁵ I have discussed elsewhere the rules and ways of conducting fieldwork in the disciplinary tradition of folklore studies and *etnografija* (Valtchinova 2004: 4–5, 6); cf. the comments of Balıkcı 1998.

⁶ Students of Catholic pilgrimages have shown that participant observation of a pilgrimage is an extremely intense and burdening experience: cf. Bax 2000; Claverie 2003: chapter 2.

identifying such events, not by interviews or ready-made questionnaires. Penetrating the social life of a group or a community through such events provided a suitable entry into otherwise closed human worlds. Sometimes, the chance witnessing of an ‘event’ determined further observations at a new field site; therefore, short stays and frequent visits made it possible to work concurrently at more than one site.

1.2. Case Studies of ‘Religious Revival’ in Postsocialist Bulgaria

Case 1: ‘St. Petka’ in Trun

In 1994–97 I conducted fieldwork on what I considered a common case of Orthodox religious revival in Trun, a small town in Western Bulgaria, near the Serbian (former Yugoslavian) border. I chose to concentrate on its clearest expression: the ‘rebirth’ of the cult of St. Petka, the local patron saint, which had allowed for the return of a more or less regular parish life. This outburst of ancient devotions was also attractive to the numerous local Roma recently converted to evangelicalism. During research it turned out that the revival was due mainly to the activism of a handful of middle-aged and elderly women who had won the financial support of some local businessmen. The institutional Church was largely absent from the provincial churches in this marginal and impoverished area. As one of the locals reported, the parish priests were busier with the ‘black-market’, petrol smuggling in particular, than with working to save human souls⁷. The lay actors of the religious revival had various motivations; most declared that their actions were ‘led by pure faith’, although one could also suspect a hope for divine reward in exchange for earthly service, especially among the leading businessman. The most active lay actors, however, a retired unmarried woman (G.) and a middle-aged unemployed mother (K.), presented their deep personal involvement as the direct result of divine agency through ‘dreaming’.

G. dreamt regularly, and during the first few years following her retirement (1989), she was repeatedly visited in her dreams by her dead relatives. They purportedly urged her to keep records of the ongoing events and to take care of the semi-ruined chapel dedicated to Saint Petka, the patron saint not only of the town, but also of her family. When the chapel was finally restored (1993) – becoming, almost overnight, a magnet for faith healing – G. was ‘appointed’, in her dreams as its gatekeeper. As this occurred, she began telling visitors the ‘true’ story of the saint’s life and deeds. The first time I heard the story, I was struck by the reference to Vanga, the famous living Bulgarian seer, whose authority was evoked both to support the ‘truth’ of the narrated story and to give credence to the saint’s cult (by this time, Vanga had built her own church dedicated to St. Petka). Through hearing subsequent reiterations of the story, I noticed that the evocation of Vanga might shift around in the overall structure of the narrative, but its function remained unchanged: the seer was evoked to assess ‘the truth’ in matters deemed inaccessible to human knowledge, and to strengthen the cult of her favourite saint.

In 1998, the much younger K. had taken over the daily maintenance of the chapel, a highly prestigious activity in the eyes of the local believers. Feeling the resistance of most of the elderly women to her increased importance in the management of the holy place, she used various strategies, from giving accounts of her own dreams to pointing to her mother’s clairvoyance, to legitimise her involvement. She also tried to minimise her own role, reducing it to ‘cleaning’, and at the same time to present it as something entrusted humbly upon her by divine will. I heard twice the story of a dream in which Vanga appeared to K., gave her an apron and asked her to hang it in a special place cherished by St. Petka; manifestly the story was told to anyone willing to hear it. Thus Vanga, in a sense, ‘appointed’ K. to do the work in question, so that she would be acting on behalf of the tutelary saint, who thus attached prestige to the ‘cleaning’ activities associated with the

⁷ It was not my impression from the only priest I was acquainted with, Father Peter, whom I met (and talked with) several times in 1997–99. However, my impression was that his discourse, heavy-laden with anticommunist rhetoric, was of little relevance to the local realities: the two very old informants he introduced me to in order to hear about “what communists had done with our faith”, related stories about clashes between ‘unbelievers’ and the faithful prior to the establishment of the communist regime.

apron (normally the housewife's chores). A few months later, 'Vanga's apron' was hung besides the door. In 1999, a small image of the prophetess could also be seen at the improvised altar, just behind Our Lady's icon.

Case 2: The Chapels of Momčilovtsi

In 1999, I did a two-week field study on the religious revival in a village in the Smolyan district, in the central part of the Rhodopes Mountains. Momčilovtsi, on the border between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria (from the late 19th century until 1912), had had a turbulent history. In the interwar period it arose as a place of militant Christianity, as orthodoxy wed to nationalism, producing specific forms of 'patriotic' religiosity, reflected in the fresco paintings of the village church (early 1960s), as well as in the activities of the parish priest, who was also the local historian⁸. One year after the priest's death (1998), the new parish priest was already well established and widely accepted by the local community (not only the faithful). As did his predecessor, he carried out masses in turns in Bulgarian and ethnically mixed (with Pomak) villages, and also conducted processions against hail and drought whenever a group of villagers asked him to do so. Due to the booming interest in 'religion', the new priest was overloaded by demands for baptisms and church weddings, which by that point exceeded funerals – the most common rite of passage administered by the former priest. Unlike in the socialist past, the sacraments constituted the most time-consuming part of the parish priest's everyday duties. In an effort to maintain control over the various practices, beliefs and devotions, the priest also supervised the renovation of a number of old chapels, as well as the construction of new ones. Forming a circle around the village,⁹ most chapels were located on the border between Momčilovtsi and the nearby Pomak villages.

It was clear that accompanying the priest provided only one of the possible 'entries' into the religious life of the village. The other one was to follow an individual's trajectory to 'religion' by visiting holy places, observing various rituals, and talking to people that visited one or more of the chapels scattered around the village. Thus I knew that most holy places were associated with a particular family, and developed into holy places for the village community only at a later stage. As a rule, the (re-)building of a chapel was decided by a member of the same family from which someone claimed to have received a message in a dream; such messages were said to have come either from the patron saint, or from one's forebears. In three cases, I noticed that the mystical order for (re-)building a chapel came from, or was confirmed by, the seer Vanga: the priest was consulted only later, and his role was generally limited to sanctioning the beginning of the construction work, or even what was already built. The seer's name was also mentioned apropos as that of the most popular chapel, the one erected near a spring of 'holy water' (*ayazmo*) found by a visionary woman in the early 20th century (cf. Kanevski 2002: 7–18). According to occasional visitors in August 1999 (half of the 18 persons interviewed on the spot, all except one local inhabitant), the *ayazmo* enjoyed respect and popularity under socialism because Vanga "sent people for a cure there". Reported recoveries of the sick disarmed even the hardest Party members. During a trip in the surrounding area in the company of the old priest's granddaughter – then curator of the local museum – I found a new and remote holy place, in which some villagers paid devotion to Saint Petka. In the early 1990s, the saint had allegedly appeared to a woman returning from a consultation with Vanga. Bridging the distance between 'religion' and 'nation' – something the old priest used to do in his lifetime – the granddaughter/historian commented on the Bulgarian-ness of saint Petka in these words: "Vanga must have sent 'her' saint here, the patroness of Bulgaria."

In the last few years Momčilovtsi has become a champion of 'cultural tourism'; the chapels built around the village provide starting points for cultural and patriotic walks (Todorov 2006).

⁸ Father Konstantin Kanev (1924–1998) served as a parish priest over 50 years. He was the author of a well-documented history of the village (Kanev 1975), acclaimed as one of the best works on regional history; his archives still provide food for thought for historians and journalists.

⁹ See map in Kanevski 2002.

Case 3: *Khristina*

In the summer months of 2002 and 2003, in the Rhodopes Mountains, near the famous tourist resort Pamporovo, I did field research on Khristina, a newly established ‘star’ of clairvoyance and alternative medicines. The clearly middle-aged woman, a convert from Islam to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, had started her ‘career’ some ten years before, earning national renown only after a period of great struggle to establish herself in the local arena. According to the seer’s elaborate and widely publicised life history – perhaps a bit too hagiographical – “it all started” when she was forced (by her workmates) to enter an Orthodox church and to light a candle¹⁰. Not surprisingly, this happened in the late eighties, during a campaign to Bulgarianise all Muslim nationals. At this time, Khristina was struck with instantaneous loss of speech and movement. This crisis was followed by a long period of recovery, punctuated by visits in her dreams from the Holy Virgin (Sveta Bogorodica), as well as other saints, the powerful healing saint St. Panteleimon among them. Sveta Bogorodica promised her full recovery in exchange for “taking Jesus into her heart”; conversion to Christianity was therefore the ‘price’ for health and life. According to the popularised story, the freshly converted Khristina, at a crossroads of her life, visited Vanga, who predicted that she would become ‘a great healer’ and would also ‘build a church’. In search of personal fulfilment, Khristina went to Dzhuna, the famous (now deceased) Soviet (Georgian) medium and healer, who taught her the art of extrasensory healing. She returned home with a certificate from Dzhuna, and then made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, specifically to Jerusalem, a necessary step supposed to complete her personal transformation. Nevertheless, after all this she still had troubles with some local Christians, who avoided her and spread rumours about her dissolute morals. Recognition came only after Khristina, acting upon the saint’s pronouncements in her dreams, decided to erect a chapel (referred to as a ‘monastery’) to St. Panteleimon, with an adjoining small building with living space for herself. The consecration of the monastery attracted crowds, among them distinguished laymen and churchmen. During my initial visits, I noticed photographs of the event exhibited on special boards outside the monastery buildings, next to advertisements for Khristina’s healing power.

Khristina was not present at St. Panteleimon during my first three visits; she was away for professional reasons, “to reload (her power)” in a monastery situated somewhere in Northern Greece. I was able occasionally to meet and talk to visitors who had come either as *pilgrims* (“to light a candle in St. Panteleimon’s church”) or as *patients* (“for the health”). Talking to them was enriching, since each visitor was eager to share his or her version of “how Khristina had become” a healer and a clairvoyant, as well as to exchange practical knowledge about healing and medicine. They made me aware of the existence of Khristina’s “brother in Jesus”, a visionary man who came “to help” her and who had started his own practise next door to hers (“he’s good for the eyes”)¹¹. A talk with two Turkish women from Dospat provided the missing information. They elucidated on her personal transformation and her name change in the late eighties, and insisted that she converted because of her suffering. These women still called her by her former Turkish name. When I finally met Khristina, she would discuss nothing other than healing. It turned out that the day we met, a Wednesday, was a day reserved for ‘dispelling magic’. Staring at me, she told me straight away, “I see you don’t have magic stuff in your house”; and then she ended the meeting.

Subsequent visits substantiated the support Khristina enjoyed, especially from rich sponsors, some of them living abroad (in Greece and Turkey!), as well as the continuing ambivalence on the part of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. By 2005, various healing procedures were performed inside St. Panteleimon. “Spending a night in the church”, a traditional method for having a baby among Pomak women throughout the Rhodopes, was now prescribed by the healer, with a list of ritual gestures to perform and rules to respect, in order to receive quick help from God. These prescriptions were also hung on the church

¹⁰ The now official story presenting Khristina as ‘Vanga’s Heiress’ is inserted in a booklet designed for pilgrims and visitors (see St. Panteleimon: 13–16). The other texts in the booklet are a summary of St. Panteleimon’s life, a popular account of his cult places in Greece, a prayer to the saint, and some details about the current (by 2003) activities of Khristina.

¹¹ A more pragmatic dimension of this alliance appears in the booklet: the land on which the monastery of St. Panteleimon is constructed was owned by ‘brother George’ (St. Panteleimon: 19).

walls behind the religious icons. In April 2006, on the eve of Orthodox Easter, a crowd of disabled people, some in wheelchairs, expected to assist in the Divine Liturgy that would be performed by four priests. They enjoyed the idea of spending the entirety of this “most holy” night in the church.

The three cases are indicative of different facets of the postsocialist religious revival. The first one focused on the revival of a parish in a small border town; the second, on a similar process in a village located in a predominantly Muslim (Pomak) region. In both, my attention went to the real actors of the religious renewal, and not to those entitled to administer cult life (local priests entered the scope of my fieldwork only when they were explicitly recognised as such actors), nor to the congregation, generally speaking (if the latter is defined as a self-conscious assembly of believers united by regular church life, it was hard to detect). The third case focused on a specific aspect of the religious revival: the religiously motivated healer who practiced in or near a church (or a chapel), and whose place became fashionable for both healing and devotion. Pilgrimages, an important facet, featured here (cf. also Case 4) as a by-product of other developments; the most important Orthodox pilgrimages, such as the one at Krastova Gora, are not addressed. However, most of the processes typical of religious revival are taken into account.

The accounts above show that, when looking at the actors and promoters of the religious revival *in loco*, the main driver of the postsocialist Orthodox revival was not the Church, but rather lay people, religious entrepreneurs whose individual ‘conversion to religion’ – the result of either a dramatic event or a prosaic process – was the basis of their activism. They appeared to be conscious of the fact that they were stepping into a special social field in which they could not act without expertise or charisma, and they were cautious to assess their own legitimacy as religious actors. It is exactly in this respect that all the cases intersected at one focal point, namely Vanga, or Evangelia Surcheva Gushterova (1911–1996), the famous seer/fortune-teller/clairvoyant who gained prominence under socialism¹². Her symbolic presence at different *loci* and at different levels of the religious revival is a challenge for the anthropological study of postsocialist religion and religiosity in Bulgaria. The first example shows her symbolic place in the religious revival of a small town, which, as far as Orthodoxy is concerned, was initiated from below and carried out mainly by lay people; ‘the Church’ and religious specialists, in the strict sense of the word, played a very modest role in this enterprise. ‘Vanga’ was part of the self-legitimising procedures of lay people who acted as *de facto* religious entrepreneurs to gain authority vis-à-vis their associations. The second case shows the same logic at work, by illuminating the hierarchical place of the seer alongside the saints and forebears, in both the mechanisms of belief and in the practices that helped the Orthodox revival. In the third case, ‘Vanga’ was again evoked to legitimise an emergent visionary and luminary of alternative medical healing, who had employed considerable efforts to earn authority by drawing from all possible sources of legitimacy (all four delineated in Lindquist 2001). In all three cases, Vanga was used for self-legitimation and empowerment in the process of constructing oneself as a conscious actor in the religious field. What that means, in turn, is that ‘Vanga’ was structurally embedded in the intimate mechanisms of the postsocialist “return to religion”. I will orient my arguments around why this is so.

¹² For the multiple meanings of the original Bulgarian term, *vračka* (lumping together healing and witchcraft), see Valtchinova 1998; for its various translations, see Iliev 2000 (soothsayer; healer); Kaneff 2002: 104 (fortune teller). At stake in these terminological switches are both adequate translation of cultural realities, and the negotiation of a higher status: “Vanga finds missing people, helps solve crimes, diagnoses disease, and reads the past. But her greatest gift is prophesy [...] she foretells the future with astonishing accuracy” (Ostrander and Schroeder 1971: 265).

1.3. Approaching 'Religious Specialists' in Orthodoxy

When looking for the actors who have negotiated the twists and shifts in the meaning of 'religion' under socialism, it is useful to note the distinction, underlined by Dragadze (1993: 149–50), between 'ritual specialists' *inside* and *outside* 'religious buildings'. Perhaps it seems too restrictive for the postsocialist context that people acting for and in the religious revival may well not even be ritual specialists but simply believers, mere lay persons whose activities influence religious life on a local, regional, or national level. They are 'religious entrepreneurs', a technical term I will use for a variety of actors, from institutionally recognised religious specialists (priests and monks) to self-appointed religious promoters, who, anchored in their specific understandings of 'religiosity' and religious orthodoxy, played a decisive role in renewing or changing the course of religious life in both smaller and larger Christian communities¹³.

Shifting from the Church-oriented approach to an actor-oriented approach helps to espouse the *emic* perspective on religious life. It takes into account the fact that in their everyday life people do not relate to the categories of 'religion' and 'religiousness' as defined by the religious institutions. Although usually condemned by the Church¹⁴, for the ordinary lay person, (even in fully modernised societies,) recourse to popular experts of healing and supernatural mediation may be viewed as 'religious practice'. On the other side, (many studies have shown that) religious healers and popular mystics do not dissociate themselves from the believers, at least in Christian cultures, and indeed claim to act according to religious precepts. Therefore, including the 'popular' experts in the category of *religious specialist* writ large, as Victor Turner 1997 [1973] did, is the best approach to follow for an anthropologist. Turner advocated¹⁵ the inclusion, under the umbrella of 'religion', of diviners, seers, mediums, and witches, et al: in a word, all those, who in a special way, manipulate the supernatural for their own society's ends. Ernest Gellner defends a similar viewpoint with the example of the Moroccan holy men (1984). Among other Mediterranean instances, ethnographies from Greece (Stewart 1991; Seremetakis 1991) show how authority in matters of healing or death is easily transferable to the religious realm, *lato sensu*, and vice versa, dissolving clear delimitations between types of expertise. In this mindset, it is not an aberration to consider seers, clairvoyants, and healers as actors of the religious revival and 'bricoleurs'¹⁶ of religion.

Making the category of religious specialist more inclusive, helps make use of the concept of *religious field*, which, according to Bourdieu (1971), is a system of relationships of concurrence or transaction between religious agents, who are defined by their positioning vis-à-vis the monopolist institution. The constitution of the religious field clearly coincides with the modernisation of a society, wherein the rationalisation of beliefs and rituals, and the 'moralisation' of the religion practiced by peasant populations are among its main characteristics. It is paralleled by the loss of any religious capital possessed by lay people, and the concentration of both religious knowledge

¹³ This attempt at defining the category of 'religious entrepreneur' owes much to the vast array of religious promoters depicted by W.A. Christian, Jr., 1996: chapters 3-5 and especially chap. 8, pp. 217–242.

¹⁴ Studies of rural Greece suggest that at least until the mid-20th century, folk- and religious healing existed locally as viable alternatives to modern medicine (Blum and Blum 1965) and also to church-based religious life (Danforth 1989).

¹⁵ As he put it (1997 [1973] : 83), "processes of bureaucratization, involving rationality in decision making, relative impersonality in social relations, routinisation of tasks, and a hierarchy of authority and function, have produced a large number of types, grades, and ranks of religious specialists in all the major religious systems." His functionalist posture is especially fitted to our concern with the local's point of view.

¹⁶ There is a general consensus around the use of Lévi-Strauss' (1962) notion of *bricolage* in describing religion as a free combination of elements of various religious doctrines, rituals, and spiritualities. In this vein, D. Sabeen (1997: 90–1) calls a peasant prophet "bricoleur", while C. Humphrey (1998) describes the shamans as "the *bricoleurs* of the Soviet world".

and religious skills in the hands of a professional body (the clergy) possessive of its complete authority over religion (Bourdieu 1971: 298–306). The French sociologist made the point that the growing gap between the religious professionals and the actors of the ‘magic-religious’ realm (downgraded by the former) is a result of the struggle for dominion over the sacred. This struggle characterises a religious field “in the making” and would attest to an unaccomplished process. Bourdieu, however, remained ambiguous about whether to extend the category to include the nebulous body of ‘medico-religious experts’, and thus sanction the transformation of the religious field in the direction of medical expertise and life/health concerns¹⁷. Nevertheless, this step is being done in important studies on religion in Western societies today (cf. Barnes and Sered 2004; Lautman 1995). In this paper, the entwining of religion and medicine as a characteristic of late-modern or post-modern religious field is taken for granted.

1.4. Religion, Church and Power in Modern and Contemporary Bulgaria

The category of religious field helps charter the structure and loci of religious life in a Balkan society that is fairly different from the western modernity on which Bourdieu had based his notions. During the whole early-modern period and well into the century of nationalism (the 19th century), Balkan Orthodoxies had developed under the cover of and according to rules imposed by the Ottoman Empire. The Orthodox Church was the main structure for sustaining community life and resisting against an active (and politically dominant) Islam¹⁸, and also against proselytising religions in general. Confined to a defensive posture, the Church sanctioned basic activities (i.e., administering the sacraments) that maintained the boundary vis-à-vis the religious *other*, and countered voluntary conversions to Islam, or Roman Catholicism. This strategy fostered a more ritualistic church life, based less on scriptural precepts, but rather on emotional mobilisation that was, however, more permeable to flaws from ‘below’¹⁹. Daily coping with overarching Islam dictated tolerance and in many cases – such as cooperation between priests and other ritual specialists, healers or ‘witches’ [*vrački*] – deviant practices, although condemned, were not really repressed²⁰. Using Whitehead’s vocabulary, one could say that all these developments blurred the boundary between the doctrinal and the imagistic religiosity in the Balkan Orthodox Christianity.

Created by the Sultan’s decree in 1870, the Bulgarian Exarchate, or the autonomous Bulgarian Orthodox Church, preceded the national state, and to a large extent determined the playing space and the front lines of Bulgarian nationalism. In 1872, this redefinition was stigmatised by the (Greek) Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople for *phyletism* (ethnicism), and led to the so-called Bulgarian schism, which isolated the Bulgarian Church from inter-church communication for 70 years.²¹ Thus historical circumstances deepened the growing dependency of the Church on the national State created in 1878 (Ljubenova 1999, Kalkandzhieva 2004: 149–56). This reliance became more pronounced when the schism was finally removed in 1945 with the help of the

¹⁷ Further ideas about the religious field and the ‘struggle over the sacred’ are developed in length in Bourdieu 1980. The author refers to the interpenetration of health and religion as “dissolution of religion” (Bourdieu 1985, 1987).

¹⁸ In particular, the Orthodox monasteries are depicted as the loci of resistance par excellence, by the historiographies and in educational discourses in modern Greece, Serbia, and socialist Bulgaria (Riis 2002: 104–20) alike.

¹⁹ The point is made mainly by students of Orthodox Greece: cf. Seremetakis 1991; Stewart 1991; Hart 1992.

²⁰ Developed in Valtchinova 2006: chapter 4. The Church stigmatised the ‘sorcerers’ and ‘witches’ in an expressive way, through the frescoes in the churches. This pictorial discourse was given no practical enforcement: there were no witch trials in the Orthodox cultures under Ottoman rule, and no judicial procedures comparable to the Western ones.

²¹ After the second Balkan war of which Bulgaria was the big loser (Bucharest treaty of 1913), the Exarchate – based in Istanbul – was practically destroyed; the last Exarch, Josif, died in Sofia, in 1915. Then for thirty years the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was ruled by a collective body, the Synod, which was created after the Liberation of 1878 and had its siege in Sofia.

Patriarchate of Moscow; again, channels of lay power and connivance between communist ‘brother’ states proved helpful for the recovery of the Patriarchate in 1953, some 650 years after the death of the last Patriarch of medieval Bulgaria. The Church was in debt vis-à-vis the regime, and the Party knew how to exploit it. Indeed, apart from three waves of anti-religious persecutions in the first decade following the September 1944 coup, there are no records of direct persecution against representatives of the Orthodox Church after 1953 (Kalkandzhieva 1997: 283–7). The new strategy included co-optation of the high Church hierarchy into state power structures, and close monitoring of low clergy (priests were encouraged to report on fervent believers). Yet church-based religion in socialist Bulgaria probably lost more souls through rural out-migration and urbanisation, than as a result of persecutions and pressure on the believers (cf. Valtchinova 1999: 133–7; 2002).

The decades of collaboration with (and corruption by) the communist regime provoked a deep division within the Bulgarian Orthodox church; from 1992 to 1999, two synods and two patriarchs struggled for the Orthodox souls. This crisis of legitimacy paralysed the Orthodox Church throughout the 1990s, and its aftermath is still perceivable in the beginning of the new millennium (Broun 1993, 2004; Kalkandzhieva 2004: 159–72). As the latter author points out, the quarrels that made the Bulgarian Orthodox Church so weak in postsocialism show that “the communist regime did not annihilate religiosity in Bulgarian society, but hit and seriously damaged the religious institutions, especially the Orthodox Church” (Kalkandzhieva 2004: 173).

Perhaps the ineffectiveness of the Orthodox Church is due to a deeper weakness. The centuries-long defensive posture of Orthodoxy led to its retrenchment into an attitude of ‘preserving one’s own flock’; hence the lack of missionary projects even after the Church found itself state-sponsored and Eastern Orthodoxy was recognised as ‘traditional religion’. The only missionary-like activity of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church occurred during the Balkan wars (1912/1913), and was addressed to the Pomaks (the Bulgarian-speaking Muslim population); the project of turning them “back to the faith of their ancestors” was a catastrophe (Eldarov 2004: 98–120). The Bulgarian Church never developed internal missions; the attempts at proselytising the rural populations in the interwar period were rare and feared²². When the political change of 1989 put Orthodox Bulgaria to the challenge of proselytising – especially by new Protestant denominations like Pentecostals, and sects like the Moonies, or Jehovah’s Witnesses – a ‘moral panic’ over the growing sects strengthened the Orthodox clergy through both Synods. Rejection of ‘foreign proselytism’ was expressed *en bloc* by both followers of and contenders against Patriarch Maxim: all insisted on state regulation of confessions. In this respect, Bulgarian Orthodox Church was in line with the vision of Orthodoxy as a tool for holding together a specific Christian collective identity, and in the struggle against proselytising churches and sects, which is led by all Orthodox Churches²³. Thus fear from concurrence with new religions and active denominations, and a more general unwillingness to see the religious arena as an open ‘market’, sealed the *de facto* dependence of the Orthodox Church vis-à-vis the State, whatever its discontent with political power.

The Orthodox Church, namely its activity and its complex relationships with secular power under different regimes, is only one side of the problem; the other deals with common knowledge and popular ideas about the Church, religion, and Bulgarians’ religiosity. Proclaiming Orthodoxy as the

²² Lay religious organisations as parish prayer groups, created under the aegis of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, proliferated only after the First World War. For other proselytising organisations see Valtchinova 2006: 251–79.

²³ Examples of the policy of the Greek Orthodox Church towards ‘sects’, which is blamed by international agencies as being opposed to ‘human rights’, are particularly relevant here: Payne 2003; cf. also Ilić 2005: 297–302.

“traditional religion of Bulgarians”, the state assigned the Church the role of keeper of national consciousness during the centuries when Bulgaria was deprived of statehood. This stand was sealed in the historiography, especially in historical writing under socialism (Riis 2002), and was reflected in the national education. Relating the Church to Nation, to support national identity, and to struggle for national emancipation has been a common device in Southeast and Central Europe (cf. Sadkowski 2001 for Poland). In the Bulgarian case, this politicking had the effect of distancing the present-day Church from the past (Sugar 1989). Socialism valued the Church with regard to the past and its material traces; old churches and monasteries were celebrated for specific events or for their historical value. Shrines embodying religion became objects for the preservation of ‘cultural heritage’; churches were transformed into spaces for memory (Valtchinova 2002: 83–4).

This treatment of institutional religion met little resistance. Bulgarian public opinion was not prepared to fight for the freedom of its Church, one reason being the traditional scepticism of ‘religion’. Was ‘religiousness’, or ‘innate paganism’, characteristic of Bulgarians? The question has been raised in public debates since the late 19th century, and the answers are chronicled through the writings of writers, literary critics, philosophers, historians and folklorists. Two responses had emerged prior to the Second World War: an influential conservative group considered attachment to Orthodoxy as the fundament of the ‘national character’, while leftist intellectuals contended that Bulgarians’ ‘innate paganism’ was only superficially transformed by Christianity, and that the Church had never had complete control over the religious life of the average Bulgarian. The latter vision was developed by Ivan Hadzhiski, the ‘father’ of Bulgarian sociology, whose writings²⁴ were the foundation for the theory of a ‘natural’ Bulgarian atheism. A specific trend within this broad view of “irreligion” as a national peculiarity was to overestimate the importance of Bogomilism in Bulgarian history and to magnify the “Bulgarians’ attraction to heresy”²⁵.

Not surprisingly, both ideas were popularised under socialism (Lory 2005 [1989]). The idea of the Bulgarian’s ‘natural atheism’ was further developed in works on Bulgarian religiosity based on Bulgarian ethnology and sociology. For the *etnografija* and folkloristic, studying religious life amounted to recording the facets of folk religion of the peasantry: the main interest being paid to ‘superstitions’ and things magical, with the search for deep pagan roots remaining central to the study of Christian customs and rituals (cf. Vălčinoва 1998; 2004a: 5). Sociologists proceeded in another way: in 1962, the emerging school of sociology in Bulgaria launched a national survey on the “religiosity of the Bulgarian population”. This vast project resulted in opuses that affirmed irreligion or paganism as typical of the Bulgarian psyche (Draganov 1968), and reduced the distance between *religion* and *superstition* (Oshavkov [ed.] 1970). Using modern methodologies, the latter study lumped together these two categories under the terms of ‘religious prejudices’ and ‘religious superstitions’. Thus manipulative downplaying of institutional religion was already present at the theoretical level. Relying on such studies and using the authority of science, atheist propaganda chartered a negative image of the Church, grounding it on the idea of a ‘natural’ Bulgarian atheism.

²⁴ Most of them are assembled in Hadzhiski 1974 [1938], especially pp. 47–84.

²⁵ Bogomilism (from the name of pope Bogomil, who allegedly preached it) is a dualist heretic movement close to Manicheism that spread in medieval Bulgaria in the 10th century. It was already magnified as a specific Bulgarian way into Christianity by interwar intellectuals influenced by theosophy and oriental doctrines, as well as by Petar Dunov and his religious movement, the White Brotherhood (cf. Krasztev and Kerényi 2001). For the ideological use of Bogomilism under socialism, see cf. Benovska 1998.

2. The Seer Vanga: between medicine woman and ‘Pythia’

In light of the above observations, it is easy to understand what is at stake when asking questions of “who” Vanga was: how she was defined in terms of skills and competences; who had the power to give such definitions; whether her identity changed over time; how the socialist State managed Vanga’s ‘gifts’, and to what extent it influenced the public attitudes vis-à-vis the seer. The following section addresses some of these questions, and at the same time gives insights into the social imaginary of the Bulgarian society under socialism.

2.1. *The Seer Vanga in the Implicit Knowledge of Bulgarians*

The notion of *implicit social knowledge* is a basic feature in my conceptual framework. The category of implicit (or social, or shared) knowledge stems from philosophical and sociological elaborations on the notion of ‘common sense’, and is used by a broad range of social scientists. I evoke Michael Taussig’s definition of implicit social knowledge as “an essentially inarticulable and imageric nondiscursive knowing of social relationality [...]acquired through practices rather than through conscious learning, like one’s native tongue; one of the dominant faculties of what it takes to be a social being” (Taussig 1987: 367, 393). Underlining the need for a similar tool, anthropologists working on Balkan societies have made use of the term²⁶. The concept of implicit social knowledge outlines the structural autonomy of the ordinary actor vis-à-vis the religious institution (the Church), and helps separate the levels of ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’.

The life and deeds of the seer might be told in a variety of ways; most of the existing writings, produced by relatives and friends, are sorts of ‘lay hagiography’ of Vanga, a mixture of facts and personal recollections of séances, biographies, and compendiums of her prophecies and precepts,²⁷ which became bestsellers immediately after their release. All of them repeat what remained for decades implicit knowledge about the seer. The following sketches provide the highlights and seminal events of the seer’s life that are firmly set in popular representations. It subsumes the common knowledge²⁸ about ‘Vanga’ shared by adult Bulgarians by the 1990s:

- Vanga (V.), or *Petričkata vračka* [the seer/soothsayer from Petric], was a Macedonian/a native of the town of Strumica, ‘in Macedonia’;
- “Struck by a whirlwind”, she lost her sight in her teens and “got the gift of seeing”;
- V. started to ‘see’ and prophesise during the Second World War in 1941; in a trance, she could foresee which people would die and who would return from the battlefield;
- V. was able to ‘see’ one’s destiny in lumps of sugar; or through his/her watch.
- During Second World War, “she predicted the death of King Boris III” and “the coming of communists”;
- V. suffered police surveillance and repression ‘under communism’; she was subject to interdiction from ‘fortune telling’ – and yet, V. also ‘helped the border police’ to find fugitives;

²⁶ According to Van de Port (1998: 97, 100), this is “a murky and obscure knowing, muted and marginalized” that only rarely surfaces in public discourses; nevertheless, being “a reservoir of insights that are not contained in a society’s canons”, it has an “enormous power [...] as a motivational force in the lives of individuals and groups”.

²⁷ Listed in the reference list under ‘Sources’.

²⁸ The formulations and their succession are my construct; thereby I tried to give shape to unstructured knowledge captured in interviews with informants, informal talks, allusive and metaphorical speech, and other forms of communicative acts that transmitted the implicit knowledge about this specific cultural “institution” that Vanga had become already in the sixties (Ostrander and Schroeder 1971: 284). For a more formal account of Vanga’s life and professional activities put in their historical and political contexts, see Valtchinova 2004: 179–83.

- V. was officially employed by the municipality of Petric; the town of Petric achieved special status under socialism because of Vanga;
- V. ‘studied’ at/was ‘employed’ by the Institute of Suggestology;
- It was ‘hard’/‘impossible’ to get a consultation with V. without connections [*vruzki*]; the best connections to V. were through Party officials;
- V. was the ‘guru’ of the Bulgarian leader’s daughter, Ludmila Zhivkova (1939–1980);
- V. was ‘supported by’ or ‘friend of’ prominent intellectuals (Party members) and closely connected to Zhivkov’s regime;
- V. was the Bulgarian Pythia/ the Bulgarian Prophetess;
- She was the first or “the most powerful” extra-sensory healer in Bulgaria.
- And she initiated and sponsored the construction of a church at Rupite, dedicated to St. Petka ‘the Bulgarian’.

The common knowledge regarding Vanga’s ‘gift’ (i.e., her capacity for ‘seeing’ the past and ‘predicting’ the future), is less consensual than about facts of her biography. The highest degree of consensus formed around her gift to “find missing people” during the Second World War, which was never challenged. From the early fifties well into the nineties, there have been two trends of thinking and talking about the seer: to put it simply, one positive and one negative. According to the latter interpretation – more characteristic of the first decades of socialism – Vanga was a ‘charlatan’ who profited from the ‘superstitious mind’ of ordinary folk. This negative biography recycles well-known Church discourses against “sorcerers and witches”, using the argument *a contrario* to accuse people who would “go to a witch” of being “superstitious,” and therefore backward. Vanga’s performances in divining her clients’ names, as well as her ‘knowledge’ about their personal histories and past experiences, were attributed to a network of ‘spies’ she purportedly relied on for gathering information. According to her supporters, Vanga’s abilities were the natural ‘phenomena’ (most explicitly Dobrijanov 1995) of a clairvoyant, whose extrasensory talents for seeing the past and future allowed her to ‘know’ people’s names and facts. They even claimed that her gift could be explained through the physiological, psychological, and biophysical sciences, and rejected any suggestions of ‘superstitions’. At the same time, the study of her gift was entrusted to more ambiguous ‘sciences’ like parapsychology, a barely veiled form of mystic knowledge²⁹, which dominated the public discourses related to Vanga in the eighties. It was during this time that the ‘parapsychologist’ emerged as the new authority on cosmic and human enigmas. By the end of the eighties, scientific and medical scrutiny of the seer was abandoned for a more spiritual approach, resulting in a return to religious identifications for Vanga; and thus epithets such as ‘the Prophetess’ or ‘Pythia’ replaced the old-fashioned *vračka*. By contrast to traditional Christian benchmarks, which were part of an intimacy shared by Orthodox seers and their clients, the new religious identifications, the fruit of elaborate intellectual constructs (cf. Valtchinova 2005), were sought out in the archaic pre-Christian past, and were introduced in public discourse gradually, after having circulated for decades as rumours and ‘hidden knowledge’. The conscious characterisations of various collective scientific and intellectual agencies, and the nomenclature of Party officials that had influenced public discourse about Vanga, conditioned the Bulgarians’ implicit knowledge of her in a variety of ways. One of them is summarised in the following section.

²⁹ As, for instance, the self-proclaimed parapsychologist and specialist of occult sciences Kubrat Tomov, former adviser of Ljudmila Zhivkova. The latter’s infatuation with the Eastern religious doctrines and the occult was an open secret for Bulgarians (cf. Atanasova 2004: 287). The intellectuals’ search for mysticism was complementary to nationalism, and an important element of the spiritual climate prior to the changes of 1989.

2.2. 'Knowing', 'Seeing', and the Horizon of Expectations

For all those who came seeking her help, the religious character of Vanga's expertise was self-evident, an aggregate of 'gifts' and techniques for communicating with the supernatural, whether divine or otherworldly, through which Vanga shifted effortlessly. Hence the ambiguity of Vanga's activity: the ease with which she moved between these two spheres was a source of awe and admiration. The fascination with her extraordinary capacities was often accompanied by a fear of the world whose existence she unveiled. To denote this awe regarding her gifts, people used to ask one another: "Do you believe in Vanga?" The phrase 'believing in' was used in its distinctive religious meaning.

Things began to change when the Institute of Suggestology (IS), a research institute founded in 1966 at the Academy of Sciences, began to study Vanga's gift. Their study laid the ground for a shift away from an explicitly religious identification of the seer to a medical one. Some 7000 files in the IS archives, related to individual consultations with Vanga attest to an impressive attempt at organising new meaning through 'science'. The brief presentation of the findings of the analysis of a large sample of this sociological material (ca. 800 files of consultations) will help further develop the arguments in this paper.

First of all, the files showed that the overwhelming majority of those seeking consultation sought relief from some form of suffering and/or significant loss: such as illness, death of a relative, or separation. Proper medical cases were the most numerous (ca. 80% of the cases).

Secondly, the questions contained in the files were structured as 'scientific' surveys, requiring exact answers. Elaborating in a questionnaire about a consultation with a seer was not just simply addressing questions: it was an act of reorganising meaning in new categories by pressuring people's responses within a different framework. The way they were constructed shaped the lens through which people perceived a visit to the seer, and also delineated the horizon of expectations³⁰ from the seer's performance. This horizon was extremely large, from 'guessing' names and past events to giving or confirming medical diagnoses. In this way, the State-sponsored 'scientific' agency influenced the essence and controlled the meaning/s of the key words used to represent the consultation.

The questionnaires encouraged people to reveal their motivations for seeking Vanga's help, creating the feeling of a sort of medical consultation. Perhaps it was the notion of *poznavane* – translated as '[inferred] knowledge' or as 'guess' (as in 'to hazard a guess') – that is central here. The terms *poznava* (verb: to know) and *poznavane* (noun: knowledge), can also imply divination, which allowed for a broad sense of understanding but also the potentially ambiguous use of all the key words. The consultation would have been described in terms of "*knowing/guessing* about the past or the future", no matter whether it was related to health issues, accidental death, or to disappeared person/s. Here *poznava* was consciously employed both with regard to the past, and for the general shared 'truth' in what Vanga said about the visitor's past, present and future. This ambiguity expanded the possibility for confusion among the different meanings, or between levels of 'knowledge' and 'knowing': that is, the implicit social knowledge on which rested the seer's ability to 'guess', or what was 'known' by effect of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997), was assimilated through an 'extra-lucid' knowledge. This seems to have been a calculated effect:

³⁰ Here I follow R. Koselleck 1990 [1979]: 307-29, for whom the "horizon of expectations" is predicated on social life and collective experience: the more social experience is diversified – as in modernising societies, the higher the horizon of expectations.

talking in terms of ‘knowledge’ blurred the boundary between the “religious” and the “scientific” identification of Vanga’s expertise. It should be noted that the questionnaire was constructed in a way to avoid any religious identification for Vanga and her practice; she was never explicitly qualified as *vračka*, nor was a visit to her, in the way such visits were usually qualified, regarded disdainfully as ‘superstitious’ and blamed on people’s simplicity and backwardness.

The huge majority of people behaved as expected, by giving responses and sending back the questionnaires. Such a general willingness, without apparent constraint, to make a ‘collaborative effort’ to a State institution, is significant in itself. It might be explained by the emphasis placed on science implicitly associated with biomedicine³¹. In reporting about their consultations, people referred to Vanga either in the appropriate socialist code (“comrade/citizen Vanga Dimitrova”), or simply as *vračkata* (“the soothsayer”/“the folk healer”)³². As a rule, feeling deceived after an unfruitful séance with the seer led people to deny her ‘gift’ and seek penance for their decision to consult her, with some going as far as accusing her of ‘lying’ or charlatanism. Some complained about her inability to perceive what they considered to be their real problems³³.

Explaining their motivations to visit Vanga, people pointed to suffering due to loss, *lato sensu*, such as a relative’s death, divorce (exclusively women), or illness/sickness. Generally speaking, the *vračka* was expected to ‘see’ the source of one’s suffering/s and to vanquish it. Vanga, as a ‘seer’ was expected to ‘see’ the causes of suffering without the patient having to say a word about it³⁴, and by establishing the source of disease, prescribe a treatment. Many expected Vanga to confirm or reject diagnoses previously given by a medical doctor – naming “the doctor” was always reported as a ‘true prediction’ – and often, to ‘predict’ the latter’s competence to deal with the problem. They had high expectations about ‘predictions’ relative to the treatment, especially when they had to face surgery, and the chances of recovery.

The responses showed the difficulties the interviewees had to make their experiences fit into the terms and categories used in the questionnaire. The most problematic distinctions were revealed with the use of the two basic categories, *poznavane* (prediction) and *predskazvane* (premonition): wherein features such as ‘knowing names of dead relatives’, medical diagnosis, or knowing a doctor’s name, were qualified as ‘knowledge’ by some and as ‘prediction’ by others. The general impression is that due to a growing variety of meanings and levels of use, ‘knowledge’ was the most difficult notion to circumscribe.

³¹ By the end of the sixties/early seventies, the institution (IS) might have not been viewed as one promoting State policies; in socialist Bulgaria, the domain of ‘science’ was presented as a domain of positive and trustworthy ‘knowledge’ that stays outside and above ‘ideology’ and independent from the State. Also speaking of ‘constraint’, it should be kept in mind that the lack of formal and explicit constraint should not be taken as a lack of such at all; people might have felt obliged to respond, because fearing that if they didn’t, their names could be associated with those ‘simple-minded’ and backward people, who, “going to *vračka*”, were constantly blamed for being the “residue from capitalist times”; cf. Oshavkov (ed.) 1970: 131–2, 284.

³² The files containing personal letters to Vanga provide a more diversified sample of formulae for addressing the seer: in the letters from Bulgarian citizens (file N.278), terms of kinship like ‘sister,’ *kaka* [elderly sister] and *baba* [grandmother/old woman] occur thrice as frequently than ‘comrade’ or ‘citizen’. In the “letters from Yugoslav citizens” (file N.282), Vanga is usually addressed as ‘Madam’ [*Gospoda*], less frequently as ‘sister’, ‘daughter’, or ‘aunt’ (N. 282, p. 1, 22, 39), and only exceptionally as ‘comrade’. The issue deserves closer scrutiny.

³³ Typically, complaints that she “guessed names” instead of seeing the cause of a relative’s illness (File N.293, p. 42-3; N.344, p. 70, 88); about “guessing” other events and diseases but was unable to see what the visit was about (293, p. 81, 83); “she cannot see into the present and the future, and I am not interested in the past” (293, p. 21); “she guesses names and knows things in a religious style” (SAB, 904-II, file N.344, p. 53).

³⁴ Data from file N.301, p. 82; N.344, p. 89, 117, 126.

The answers showed that Vanga was able to meet her clients' expectations by drawing on the whole spectrum of 'medical knowledge' from traditional and religious healing to biomedicine. Looking through the mirror of the questionnaires, one could posit that Vanga acted in conformity with people's expectations, dispensing advice to "go to a doctor" in tandem with prescribing herbal medicine or thermal cures. As a rule, Vanga advised her clients to visit both a medical doctor and to make another appointment with her: such parallel recourse to alternative systems for dealing with human pain and suffering is confirmed in over 80 % of the reported cases. Acting in such a balanced way, the seer secured her clients' loyalty; alternating informal recourse to folk healers with formal visits to medical doctors was a common way of dealing with health problems in socialist Bulgaria³⁵. Perhaps the tendency is markedly towards a 'bio-medicalisation' of Vanga's 'gift'. The process took different shapes: making a show of medical knowledge through appropriate language; diagnosing in a medical vocabulary, that is 'knowing doctors'; and most importantly, skilfully combining the various means of healing to create a larger framework within which more traditional techniques would appear as supplementary to biomedicine. All this secured a loyal clientele; and in the majority of the cases, the seer's recommendations were followed.

2.3. *From Seer to Doctor: the universal specialist?*

The preceding observations prompt a few suggestions about the way in which Vanga secured such a unique place for herself in the Bulgarian society under socialism. First of all, the *vračka* from Petrić acted as a lynchpin between traditional and modern systems of healing, as well as – albeit in a more discrete manner – between religious and allegedly scientific ways of handling existential insecurity and problems. Switching between 'religion' and 'healing' was no problem for the seer, since both were inseparable in her mental world, her artfulness was to act in accordance with the perceived cultural and educational (i.e. social) background of her clients or patients. Most of her 'true predictions' relative to health and healing were due to her aptitude to detect, in the flow of visitors, those attached to traditional values and inclined to trusting folk healing, and to show them the more traditional aspect of her 'gift' related to the dead and to ancestors; and for those clients resolutely turned towards modern medicine, who wanted encouragement to trust 'doctors' or be directed to specific kinds of practitioners, she employed her knowledge of the world of medicine. Vanga's switching between systems of diagnosing and healing had a parallel in – and was facilitated by – the *de facto* functioning, under the cover of the allegedly unique socialist morality, of different value systems: the 'materialist' worldview was incessantly challenged by more idealistic, or fatalistic, traditional mentalities and ways of thinking the world over. Both the visionary activity and healing practices of the *vračka* were based on the practical use of implicit knowledge regarding the ways in which the social world functions.

One could suggest that in dealing with medical and existential problems, Vanga negotiated the limits of the modernist and communist ideologies of personhood and self vis-à-vis the traditional (and more 'familial') ones; a hint at such a process can be found in Iliev 2001. In a similar vein, complaints about Vanga's inability to detect certain individual's problems (see footnote 33) are indicative of a gap between different value systems. They show that the value system oriented to the past and 'tradition' to which Vanga belonged, with its marked respect to family values and the

³⁵ As W. Christian, Jr. (1991) has shown, simultaneous recourse to religious and 'secular' or scientific agencies when facing serious health problems was the rule, even where biomedicine and religion were strictly separated. In a similar vein, Lindquist (2005: 30-5) shows the existence of 'medical pluralism' well prior to the *perestroika*.

dead, clashed with the value system oriented to the future, to the ‘progress’ and individual achievement associated with ‘being modern’ (and therefore with socialism), which seems to have been interiorised by a growing number of visitors. In this way, the seer was successful where biomedicine often failed: in ‘conjuring hope’ (Lindquist 2005).

Vanga lived to see the first years of postsocialism. Literally the day after the change, she became the focus of mass media attention and remained a ‘hot topic’ until the end of her life. Newspapers profiled the first steps of the great seer, “*the truth*” about her gift, as well as her past predictions, which paralleled the hidden history of socialism, but also, in a sense, the ‘secrets of History’. These were all attractive topics for the readers. Still stronger was the public interest in new prophecies, or at least the retrospective reading of old ones, which were expected and solicited: what she had ‘seen’ and said about social crises, political changes, the parties and personalities ruling the State, the future of Bulgaria, the future of the Great Powers, and the ultimate fate of humankind. Despite the enormous public interest shown for Vanga’s ‘gift’ and powers after the change of regime, the seer was more preoccupied with affirming her place in the Orthodox world. It took several years to realise what she presented as her strongest and ultimate wish: building a church in Rupite, on the site she used to practice her craft. Upon her death, Vanga was buried near ‘her’ church.

Case 4. Rupite

In late July 1996, when I first visited “Vanga’s church” at Rupite, the famous seer was still alive. The fact that she was sick, and had not practised for years was public knowledge; nevertheless, a crowd filled the space between the church and ‘Vanga’s house’, waiting to see if she might appear outside. Some were “visiting the church outside”, commenting on the meaning of the modernist frescoes, as if they were visiting an art gallery; others jumped quickly inside, taking a look at the iconostasis and sometimes lighting a candle before going back out to continue watching; for these people, the church provided an extra motivation for being there. Still others, weary from waiting for Vanga’s appearance, paid more attention to the church, lighting a candle and praying; some of them even planned to return, on occasion, to assist a Eucharist liturgy in “Vanga’s church”. During my following visits, I knew that the ‘neophytes’ – recognisable by the careful way they performed all the ritual gestures required from the faithful – professed that they had felt the appeal of ‘religion’ at this very place, sealed by Vanga’s power.

Just before leaving, a large group of mostly senior citizens positioned themselves in front of the church for a memorial picture centred around a prominent image of King Boris III (†1943), the father of the last Bulgarian King, Simeon of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who was at that time still expected to be the country’s ‘saviour’. They were monarchists commemorating the King’s death, which, as everybody was supposed to know, Vanga had predicted. On my way back, I took a bus filled with people who turned out to be pilgrims. Was their pilgrimage to the church, or “to Vanga”? After two hours spent in discussion with ‘pilgrims’ in the bus, I realised that they did not separate the two realms; some people were infuriated by my insistence on making a distinction between ‘pilgrimage’ and ‘tourism’. Vanga was the national Prophetess, and therefore just as ‘holy’ as ‘her’ church was.

This case (analysed in Valtchinova 1998) is taken from the field notes of my first trip in Rupite. Vanga died a few weeks after this visit, on the 11th of August 1996. Subsequent and longer field trips helped me see the dynamism of the religious processes going on at Rupite. In 1997, the church was already reputed to have the highest income in the district. Three priests were permanently attached to it; two of them admitted to having parted ways with “Pimen’s” Synod and having joined the ‘red’ (Maxim’s) Synod, in order to be appointed to this church. The commemorative services held at her grave were no impediment to more typical duties of a parish priest; baptisms and church weddings were regularly performed there. Adding the shrine’s attraction to the post-

mortem celebration of the seer's gift, Vanga's church and grave quickly became a 'realm of memory' in the strict sense of the word (Nora 1986).

3. Alternative Medicines, Orthodoxy and the Religious Revival in Postsocialist Bulgaria

3.1. From Hidden to Public Knowledge

'Hidden' information becoming public knowledge was already underway during late socialism, as *glasnost* prefigured the liberation of spoken and written word in the political aftermath of 1989 that resulted in an unprecedented media boom throughout the former socialist countries. In the first two years of postsocialism, dozens of newspapers popped up in Bulgaria; at least six were specifically dedicated to religious and parapsychological 'phenomena', enigmas, oracles and predictions³⁶. The hunger for news and for information in general was typical of the post-communist opening up of the public arena, and the easing of constraints after decades in which wooden ideological language was used to promote any revelations regarding political life and its leading personalities (from the communist nomenclatura and the new elites). Memories of the recent past and all things 'taboo' under socialism literally poured out in the media. A distinctive interest developed around anything related to 'religion', a loosely defined topic that covered a range of stories from persecuted priests and debates over the Orthodox Church to horoscopes, psychics, and karmic reincarnations. Around 1992, the issue of 'the sects' started to figure prominently in this area, reaching its peak in the late nineties.

Against this background, it seems quite logical that the topic of 'Vanga' immediately became one of the most attractive subjects for the Bulgarian media: her proximity to power under socialism, and the status of a national Pythia who continued to be consulted by certain new leaders. Her visions and predictions were of particular interest; the numerous prophecies made throughout her long career, pronounced in a trance state, usually in private contexts or in small confidential circles, were a promising goldmine of revelations. Journalists and other media workers started hunting for information about Vanga's prophecies³⁷. Their rate of extraction from realms of private, hidden, or secret knowledge, depended on the heightening public interest in Vanga's life and pronouncements; the more publications on her appeared, the more the national audience was sensitised to her predictions and ready to accept 'prophecies' taken from private recollections without questioning their authenticity.

Another aspect of the move from hidden to public knowledge was the revelations about Vanga's relations with other non-traditional religious experts and mystics, from Bulgaria and abroad. The biographers were especially attentive to facts surrounding the meetings of the Petric seer with such emblematic Bulgarians from the war decade (late 1930s through mid-1940s) as Petar Dunov, the teacher of the White Brotherhood, and the popular prophet Vlayčo³⁸. Many became interested also in Vanga's encounters with late-Soviet era prophets and healers such as Dzhuna, Kashpirovski or Grabovoj, all of whom had had similar impact on the early postsocialist Russian religious

³⁶ Cf. Benovska-Sabkova 1993: passim, and Ganeva-Rajcheva 1993: 19–21; for the impact of the media on the process, cf. Lindquist (2005: 35), who noticed a similar effect of previously "semi-underground" practices that "took on clear visibility in the suddenly opening public arenas".

³⁷ The largest collection of such prophecies is compiled by journalist Zh. Kostadinova (1997, 1999). The second volume features a call for testimonies to all those who have visited Vanga and wish share their recollections.

³⁸ Cf. Tsvetkova 1998: 175–9, 191; Ganev 1993: 23–4. Notwithstanding the real impact that these encounters (dated to 1943–44) might have had on her career and renown, recasting Vanga against Bulgarian mystic and religious teachers contributed to her refashioning as an exceptional religious expert and a moral authority.

landscape (cf. Lindquist 2005: 31–2). Accounts usually represented Vanga as being more powerful in dealing with paranormal activities, and morally superior to her Russian counterparts³⁹. Occasional information related Vanga to Eastern teachers and mystics close to theosophy⁴⁰. Such direct or implicit comparisons gave the seer an additional aura, intimately associating her name with an international network of mystics and prophets. More importantly, by incorporating mystic and clairvoyant knowledge into the practices and trends typical of the New Age movement, they prepared the ground for the emergence of the field of medical-religious expertise (Bourdieu 1985), in which all kinds of religious specialists and ritual experts from the postsocialist countries could find their place. It is to the other side of this field that I now turn: alternative medicine and New Age healing.

3.2. *Mystic Knowledge and the 'Extra-sensorial'*

As I have shown in the second part, the appropriation of Vanga's expertise under socialism rested on a combination of 'science,' 'medicine' and somewhat vague 'spirituality'; 'religion' was banned from this framework, at least in what was regarded as institutionalised religion. A similar vocabulary was used to designate the practices and discourses comparable (and related) to the New Age movement, that started developing in the eighties⁴¹. In the late 1980s, homegrown practitioners of alternative medicines, called *ekstrasensi* (hereafter ES) or practitioners of 'extrasensory' healing, had a sound presence in the Bulgarian society. The boom of the ES as a social phenomenon coincided with the political change of 1989–90 and the early postsocialist years⁴²; by 1994, more than 440 ES were listed in the official register of the Bulgarian ES healers, published by their Association (*Guide* 1994), the majority of them women (72%). It was the post-communist transition – with its socio-economic crisis, insecurity, and loss of values – that provoked both the search for alternative systems of 'healing' (and the reduction of anxiety, more generally speaking), and an acute hunger for prophecies. The 'Bulgarian Pythia' and the ES were part of, and entangled within, the same social and cultural phenomenon. These similarities on the surface appear also to have been structural equivalencies of cultural phenomena: both were specific ways of mediating and symbolising social and cultural problems encountered during societal transformation. Behind this, Vanga and the ES were interrelated in a complex way; in many respects, the ES followed Vanga's techniques and strategies for public relations. And as we have seen in the case studies one and three (chapter 1.2.), the Prophetess's name was used to assess their 'gifts' and to legitimise their competences.

In Bulgaria, the word of the ES imposed itself generically for experts in all kinds of alternative medicine; advertising the specific expertise of the ES, the 1994 guide indicated at least three (and often up to ten) 'specialisations' for each member. The overwhelming majority of them put manual therapies side by side with herbal medicine in the healing of serious functional diseases, under the general description, 'undoing magic'. Among the commonest specialities of the ES, one could find

³⁹ Cf. Stoyanova [2004]: 172–6; Filipov 1998: 121–3. The accounts of Vanga's meeting with Grabovoj or with Kashpirovski are a dramatic staging not only of different types of expertise, but also of different moralities.

⁴⁰ Especially with Svjatoslav Roerich, the son of the mystic painter and innovator of theosophy, N. Roerich, and the Indian guru Sai Baba (Sidorov, 1995; Tsvetkova 1998: 168, 191–5).

⁴¹ Anticipating a more detailed study, I take for granted that *ekstrasensi* is the Bulgarian version of a New Age healer, and rely on the excellent study of B. Potrata (2004) on New Age in Slovenia.

⁴² For a detailed description and analysis of the phenomenon, see Benovska-Subkova 1993; Ganeva-Rajcheva 1993 (and the whole special issue of Bulgarian Folklore 1993/5 on 'The Paranormal'); Dimov 1994.

‘non-contact massage’ (*bezkontakten masazh*)⁴³, dowsing, and diagnosing energies; the label of ‘bio-energo-therapy’ was associated with more than 60% of the listed ES. Understandably, the public relations strategies of the ES concentrated on ‘healing’, which facilitated the successful selling of their services; perhaps ‘medicine’ was just part of the overall image of the ES. The other side of the *phenomena*, as they were called, was “communicating with extraterrestrial” intelligence or beings, or “information from above”; “cosmic intelligence” replaced a mysticism based on God and saints, but worked in the same manner. Many claimed to have been guided by a cosmic *light*, or invisible *intelligence*, their hands moved by cosmic powers to make drawings or paintings that were supposed to have extraordinary curative powers. Clairvoyant knowledge was also integrated into the image of the ES; in the 1990s, ‘clairvoyance’ and ‘predicting the future’ figured in many advertisements. An equally important share of ES healers claimed that exercising their ‘gifts’ weakened them and that they needed to ‘reload’ themselves with energy from the earth, specific trees, or in highly symbolic places⁴⁴. As a rule, their claims were articulated in a language laden with ‘scientific’ terms taken from physics and the ‘hard’ sciences (cf. Benovska-Sabkova 1993: 10–2). All this overlapping leads to a conclusion, broadly speaking, that the knowledge system articulated by ES presented a complex interface of ‘science,’ ‘religion’ and ‘ideology’⁴⁵. As B. Portrata (2004: 369) has observed, this knowledge was structured as an alternative to communist ideology, but at the same time was marked by discourses on a ‘scientific worldview’ that were compulsory (and dominant) under socialism.

ES are characterised by self-reflexivity; explaining and justifying the origins of their ‘gifts’ or ‘powers’ are central concerns for most of them. How an ordinary person ‘becomes’ *extrasens*, what leads one to transmute and find him/herself invested with special power almost overnight, is a question par excellence for assessing power, or an act of *justification* in the sense of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991). The public recognition – and the very legitimacy – of the ES healer, rests on its answer. Reading through the advertisements and biographies, one can distinguish three main devices: an *accident*; an *initiation* from outside communication with supranatural forces (extraterrestrial civilisations) that breaks one’s daily routine; and family tradition or *blood heritage* (having a healer or clairvoyant in one’s maternal or paternal ascendance)⁴⁶. The *accident* is a life-changing event, such as serious illness (usually associated with a ‘loss of consciousness’ or becoming brain dead), a wreck (road accident, air crash), or a freak accident that ‘breaks’ one’s life, splitting it in two parts – *before* and *after* the critical event. The ‘event’ bridges the gap between the person’s ordinary life prior to the event, and the claims of extraordinary capacity made afterwards by the (visibly and legally) same person. Recourse to the extraterrestrial (ET intelligence, civilization, or to a random ET ‘visitor’) is fitted into the overall explanatory

⁴³ The method is ‘invented’ and given this label by Moscow healer Dzhuna: hence the popularity of the latter in the stories of ‘becoming ES’: cf. Benovska-Subkova 1993: 6–7, Dimov 1994: 58.

⁴⁴ The techniques used for ‘reloading’ are based on physical contact with the material substance: reloading oneself from earth and rock assume putting the hands in a hole, associating ES with rechargeable electric batteries. Among the symbolic places for reloading oneself are the big Orthodox monasteries (Rila, Bačkovo) and pilgrimage sites (Krastova Gora), local Christian shrines, as well as the combination of shrine, rock caves, and mineral waters.

⁴⁵ Cf. the viewpoint of the practitioner: Orbetsova 1993 and the same in *Guide* 1994: 7–8. M. Benovska-Sabkova (1993: 14) puts it as “un-differentiation between science, religion, and mythology”. Some Bulgarian scholars of the ES prefer speaking of similarities between ES and “magic” (Todorova-Pirgova 1993; 2003: 26–34; cf. also Anastasova 2006: 70–6). Such an approach is justified by their ‘ritualistic’ viewpoint: they speak of ‘performance’ and ritual specialists who cater simultaneously to two or more systems of knowledge. Albeit ‘ideology’ is not presented as constituent of ES, the stance of “the Bulgarian’s uniqueness” (in Benovska-Sabkova 1993: 15–6 – a “mythologem of ethno-centrism”) places them among the heralds of popular, or everyday, nationalism.

⁴⁶ These devices appear also in Todorova-Pirgova 1993: 65–7 and Dimov 1994.

framework, which is based on energies, ‘bio-energies’ and ‘fields’ and corresponds to the [pseudo-] scientific vocabulary of the ES. By contrast, the claim of family inheritance of the ‘gift’ is a more traditional device; having “power in the blood”, to borrow from the title of D. Sabeau’s book (1997), is reminiscent of the ‘village culture’ that still forms the cultural background of the majority of ES healers. It provides the reassuring link with family, the immediate community, and ancestors, rooting the *extrasense*’s power in something more palpable and positive than the *accident*.

Empirical research on ES healers⁴⁷ shows that ‘Vanga’ was given a central role in this multi-levelled system of legitimisation and *justification*. The *Petrička vračka* provided the ES a model prophet/clairvoyant and an equally exemplary healer, but also an exemplar for navigating between the two domains. Moreover, some of the transformative ‘events’ recurring in the ES biographies are easily identified with those much more publicised events from Vanga’s life; her biography, with its airs of hagiography, showed what a ‘model life’ should look like: living in poverty, undergoing an ‘accident’, subsequent loss of certain faculties, and gaining of ‘divine’ gifts. This scheme is an integral part of many *ekstrasensi*’s life histories. On the other hand, Vanga was given the main role in ‘announcing’ the apparition of new prophets and ES healers; as in the case of Khristina, many referred to a ‘prediction’ about their own future that the Petrić seer had made in private consultation prior to their transformation. The Prophetess was also associated with the recognition of the ES community as a whole: in 1992, a few months after the Association of Bulgarian ES had been founded, Vanga was declared “*ekstrasens* Number One” of Bulgaria (Dimov 1994: 62). A year later, she was called “First Priestess” [*pārvozhrica*] of Bulgarian extrasensory medicine, and her benediction was requested for the publication of the Guide of the Association (*Guide* 1994: 3–4). These strategies of earning individual and/or collective legitimacy through ‘Vanga’ are still used today.

3.3. Moving back to Orthodoxy

Under socialism, the religious – in particular *Christian* – dimension of Vanga (and her activities) was repressed and reduced to a minimal (if any) outward expression. Nonetheless, it was perhaps not missing at all; as I have shown elsewhere (Valtchinova 2005), a good deal of the intellectuals’ construct of the Prophetess drew on positive and more nebulous knowledge of pre-Christian ‘pagan’ religiosity, with special emphasis on ancient Greek religion, as well as the largely invented Thracian mythology. Additional religious identifications, such as shaman and occult teacher, as well as biblical references, were added in the first postsocialist years, producing a kind of atemporal figure of a prophet, for whom the broadest religious syncretism was achieved. All these identifications were promulgated by the media, and through published biographies of the seer, which are still bestsellers. In this way, the religious field opened concomitantly to the solicitations coming from the field of alternative medicines. As her renown as Prophetess and extra-sensorial *Number One* was reaching its climax, what was Vanga’s proper identification?

Her choice was clearly for ‘religion’ – and for traditional Orthodoxy. According to the first biography (Stoyanova 1989, [2004]), Vanga had always been an exemplary Christian and a sincere Orthodox believer, “a channel between heaven and earth in times of overwhelming atheism”. Subsequent accounts show her as a regular churchgoer, someone who encouraged relatives and

⁴⁷ I rely on my own unpublished field materials as well as on oral information shared in private conversations with M. Benovska, R. Popov, E. Troeva-Grigorova, and E. Anastasova; I am grateful to all of them.

friends to ‘purify’ themselves in an Orthodox Church whenever they could find the time and opportunity, and who initiated small pilgrimages, under the guise of ‘excursions’ to historical places⁴⁸. A year after the political turnaround, the seer announced her decision (which, according to her biographers, dated from many years before) to build a church at Rupite, with the shrine constructed on a site that was shown to her in dreams by her favourite saint (Tsvetkova 1998: 110, cf. Stoyanova [2004]: 252), and dedicated to “Saint Petka the Bulgarian”.⁴⁹ This wish was met with astonishment by some, and with praise by others; Vanga’s ‘return’ to Orthodoxy, embodied in a church, the most material and palpable shape, was viewed either as the pre-mortem conversion of an inveterate unbeliever, or as the ultimate confirmation of her ‘holiness’.

Vanga’s return to Orthodoxy assumed the most traditional patterns of ‘popular religion’: celebrating a saint and giving a *kurban* (blood sacrifice) on the saint’s day, which was already being done throughout the course of the construction work (Stoyanova [2004]: 247–54). During this time, a quarrel broke out among high clerics over whether or not to consecrate the church. According to critics, Vanga was a ‘witch’; her regular communications with the dead were considered pure “commerce with the Devil”, and thus incompatible with the pious activity of “erecting a church”. After twists and turns between the two Synods, both of which were under considerable public pressure, the church was consecrated on the 14th of October 1994, the patron’s commemorative day; and the ceremony was carried out by the same clerics from the ‘red’ Synod of Maxim, who, a few months earlier, were shown in a TV documentary contesting Vanga’s church. The media reported that the event had attracted over thirty thousand people from greater Bulgaria. Many of those who attended the ceremony were motivated not by Christian piety, but rather: curiosity; Vanga’s ‘gift’; her conversion to religion; political nostalgia; or even (as Case 4 shows) ‘love for history’. Despite the sceptical voices predicting that interest would be fleeting, the church continued attracting pilgrims and visitors in the following months.

By reproducing the first impressions from the field site, the example reported in Case 4 has shown the complex perceptions and interpretations of Vanga’s ‘return to religion’. Through it, I have reiterated the many tracks that led from ‘irreligion’ under socialism to the postsocialist religious revival. My field notes have demonstrated, among other things, how ‘spirituality’ and the taste for history cultivated under socialism was transformed and channelled into ‘religion’ in the most traditional meaning of the term; how a place imbued with the seer’s physical presence, after being endowed with an Orthodox shrine, came to be seen as a God-chosen realm and a key pilgrimage destination; and how, in becoming a nodal point in the geography of pilgrimage in postsocialist Bulgaria, Vanga’s church could enhance the process of its visitors’ inner conversions through the effect of the mystic’s presence behind the shrine.

What people used to call ‘Vanga’s church’ was at once a shrine, a monument, a grave, and an emblem for a certain socialist past. Within a few years, it became a centre of intense worship for Bulgarians as well as for foreigners, and people coming from the Former Yugoslav Republic of

⁴⁸ In particular, visits to the town of Melnik, with a multitude of Byzantine churches, are represented as both sources of inspiration for Vanga’s ‘historical prophecies’ (seeing into the past), and a disguise for visiting the grave of holy Stoyna, a popular prophet from the early 20th century that lived in a nearby village: cf. Valtchinova 2006: 57–8.

⁴⁹ St. Petka (gr. Paraskevi) of Epivata is a holy ascetic and recluse with a true pan-Balkan radiance. The transfer of her relics from Byzantium to medieval Bulgaria (Tirnovo, 1231), to Serbia (Belgrade, ca. 1396), and finally from Istanbul to Jassy in Moldavia (1641), made for her ‘nationalisation’ in the three countries (see Valtchinova 2000).

Macedonia and Greece⁵⁰. Besides these pilgrimages, regularly organised for groups from throughout Bulgaria, marketing agencies also advertised the trip to Rupite and the “visit of Vanga’s church” in order to sell products of alternative medicine. In and around the shrine, the Orthodox cult mingled with the mystic doctrines (cf. Paraškevov 1996) and less orthodox practices of healing and ‘reloading’ of the ES healers. Qualified by nationalists as ‘the [most] Bulgarian holy place’⁵¹, Vanga’s church emerged as a point of high tensions, which intersected and vanquished the boundaries between religion, history and memory, even at the ethno-national level. Vanga’s church in Rupite and all that is at stake in the management of the shrine still awaits further study as a laboratory for the interactions between religion, ‘civil society’ and NGOs⁵², and between ‘religious’ activities and lay interests. Of most importance, however, was that building a church – and more profoundly, trying to materially circumscribe oneself in the Church – was the concluding movement from ‘folk’ religion, through ‘clairvoyance’ and healing, to institutional religion. Thus Vanga became an exemplar and a legitimating device for aspirant religious activists and healers.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this work, I proposed to look at the revival of Orthodoxy through the eyes of the local actors, while keeping in mind the notion of religious field. My suggestion was that at least in postsocialist Bulgaria, religious revival was largely due to lay initiative on the ground level. The Church played a relatively small role at the onset of the process, intervening only at a latter stage, to administer and control processes that had been initiated from ‘below’. Local religious entrepreneurs either confined their action to within the parishes, or deployed broad ranging activities that attracted people across national and confessional borders. Many of them shifted away from (and often transcended) their respective starting positions: for instance, beginning an individual ‘conversion’ by fasting and prayer, then gradually implicating oneself in vast common projects of religious reconstruction; or announcing one’s religious vocation through a ‘dream’ that pushed the convert to ‘build a shrine’, and later, switching to ES, or religious healing. It is unthinkable to trace the myriad of personal trajectories from ‘irreligion’ to belief, or from ‘atheism’ to religious activism. What matters is finding the general trends or patterns common to these trajectories, and to capture their logic in order to determine the resources for religious revival that started and developed mostly outside the Church. The ultimate goal of the approach ‘by the actors’ was to establish how, and in which moment, the individual trajectories of conversion in a postsocialist society became a meaningful innovative action in the religious field; and to ask: is this a result of an institutional grip on people’s initiatives, or attitudes the Church espoused by default?

⁵⁰ There was a marked difference in the attitudes of the visitors coming from these two countries; while people from Macedonia usually come as individual pilgrims, and have a rather discrete presence, Greek visitors I met (only twice) move in groups, in a framework that suggested either ‘organised pilgrimage’ or ‘tourism’. Occasionally, one could meet Russians at Vanga’s grave; in the first years after Vanga’s death one could see the mother of the same Russian-speaking family literally prostrated on Vanga’s grave, in deep prayer, asking for a cure for her son’s Down’s syndrome; she was regularly interviewed by Bulgarian journalists, who reported that she was “in search of a miracle”. Perhaps the occasional Russian presence at Rupite is more probably linked to worldly activities such as business trips (Rupite is near the main road to Greece) than a pilgrimage in the proper sense of the word.

⁵¹ “DPS [Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the Turkish party] wants a mosque near Vanga’s shrine” is a warning taken from the cover page of *Ataka* [20.12.2005], published by the homonymous nationalist party: see http://www.vestnikataka.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=4276.

⁵² I have dealt neither with the extremely interesting issue of property of the land on which the church is built (and over the whole area of thermal springs), nor with the role of the NGO ‘Vanga’ in the land management and in promoting Vanga’s cult.

Such a vast program is beyond the scope of a working paper. Here I followed only one of the many paths; I tried to show that ‘alternative’ religious specialists like the seer Vanga were one of the resources for the religious revival in Bulgaria. The seer was embedded in the postsocialist Orthodox revival both in a material way (through ‘her’ church) and in a symbolic way, with the latter seeming to be more important. ‘Vanga’ – and the representations attached to a specific *religiosity* and/or *spirituality* associated with her name – was used for symbolically mediating, or justifying, acts of inner conversion, and shifts towards ‘religion’ or quests for spirituality experienced by people. Observing the ways and contexts in which the famous seer was invoked or referred to by simple believers, or by self-conscious actors of the religious revival, suggests also that she was part of the higher agencies that people evoked (and still do), and explains the abrupt changes that led them to religion. The facets of the postsocialist revival of religion illustrated by our examples suggest that a major change in the meaning of ‘religion’/‘religiosity’ took place under socialism.

Trying to identify the mechanisms of this ‘return to religion’, I started by questioning the ways in which local actors and small religious entrepreneurs constructed themselves as specialists of ‘religion’, how they defined their mission and pursued it in everyday life, who their models were, and how they struggled for legitimacy in a field that they by definition had no place. The examples taken from multi-sited fieldwork show that the Orthodox revival in postsocialist Bulgaria owes much to traditional ‘religious’ or quasi-religious authorities (who remain dubious or who are not acknowledged by the Church), as well as to developments that occurred in the field that socialism labelled ‘spirituality’. The latter, as defined by Bourdieu (1971), significantly transformed the religious field, which led to the inclusion of new, non-institutional actors, associated with different kinds of religious-medical expertise. This *altered* religious field is also marked by the heavy weight of “non-structured spiritualities”, which are characteristic of religion today (Taylor 2002: 105). I leave this last issue open, because further debate requires additional research.

Arriving at this point, my argument has followed two lines. On one side, I have tried to show the structural weakness of the Orthodox institution vis-à-vis the State or worldly power, as well as against what I called alternative religious specialists. I have attempted to explain why, despite the obviously calamitous actions of socialism, this weakness cannot simply be attributed to religious persecutions, or to ‘compliance with communist ideology’. In turn, it explains the lack of initiative in a process of religious revival, in which the Orthodox Church took a defensive and indignant posture.

On the other side, I concentrated on the ways in which the modernising and anti-clerical communist regime dealt with non-institutional religious specialists, i.e., folk healers and village *magi* (*pace* Max Weber), and their responses. My presentation focused on the seer/healer/prophet Vanga, the Petric *vračka*, precisely because her figure is emblematic of all these trends. The case of Vanga provided exceptional insights into the fabric of ‘irreligion’; singled out as remnants of popular magic and ‘superstitions’, seers and mediums like the Petric *vračka* had in fact benefited from the official atheist policy, which was to blame ‘religious prejudices’ *en bloc*, directing the spearhead against structured religion and the Church. Lumping ‘religion’ and ‘magic’ together effectively blurred the boundaries between two domains strictly separated by Christian doctrine, and created space for the activities of the village ‘religious specialists’ that Orthodoxy never decisively condemned. Denigrated in the dominant discourses but tolerated, *de facto*, folk healers and village religious experts had no problem adapting their skills and their vocabulary to the new

speak of their clients and to the overall ideological framework that favoured ‘science’ and ‘spirituality’ at the expense of ‘religion.’ In turn, such heavy pressures disturbed the religious field, leading to its extension towards healing and medicine. It is precisely this process illustrated in the IS files, which helped reveal how a religious seer was appropriated by the socialist state, and how the perception of a seer’s identifications could shift from religious expertise to one of ‘healing,’ or from faith healing to modern biomedicine. Shedding light on the multiple pressures and agencies that made for the re-shaping of a traditional seer into a modern healer under socialism, helps elucidate the success of ‘Vanga’ in postsocialism. This explains why her name, her pronouncements and her (imagined) presence were used as a legitimising device by postsocialist healers, as well as to enhance the credibility of local religious actors.

Summing up my own field observations and the ethnographies of others, it is possible to show that in the first years of postsocialism, public interest in Vanga developed in three directions: first, making public the predictions and ‘prophecies’ the seer had made during socialism; second, establishing a direct relationship between Vanga’s gift and various forms of extrasensory healing, and thus giving legitimacy to alternative medicine in Bulgaria; and lastly, and perhaps most importantly, identifying Vanga as an exemplary Orthodox believer and venerating her in church, a process that undoubtedly catalysed the development of a cult dedicated to the seer.

In light of the preceding evidence, the outstanding role of the socialist seer in the postsocialist religious revival ceases to appear paradoxical. In the context of the global political changes of 1989/90, freedom of ‘religion’ meant not only normalised cult life and free access to churches and holy places. It also signalled the opening of a diversified religious market, integrating proselytising ‘sects,’ new religious movements and New Age medicines that was more feared than welcomed (Hann 1994; cf. Verdery 1999: 82). Clearly, it was easier for a *vračka* or folk healers – the religious *bricoleurs* par excellence – than for a conservative institution like the Orthodox Church, to adapt and find their place in the postsocialist religious market. During her long career, the *Petrička vračka* was always successful in responding to the dominant social demands under the conditions of rapid modernisation and changing political regimes. What the Orthodox Church could not accept (modernity) or was slow to engage in, alternative religious experts like Vanga – and more recently, the ‘extra-sensorial’ – used to their advantage: dealing with people’s pains and illnesses, curing and advising, and providing help either through God and church rituals, or through medicine and ‘the doctors’.

The religious actors I have concerned myself with have been mainly lay women claiming to be Orthodox but rarely backed by the Church – at least not before tangible results of their efforts have been seen. Focusing analysis on them does not mean that priority is given to ‘folk religion’, while ignoring ‘the official’ or ‘the true’ way: during the last two decades, works on religion (among others in Stewart 1991, Sabeen 1997) have invalidated this dichotomy. This two-tiered model, already disrupted by Brown (1981: 17–22), is especially inappropriate for studying religious dynamics at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. *Bricoleurs* of religiosity in postsocialism, the ordinary religious actors that made the object of this study, were able to “bridge the spiritual boundary and practices that link spirituality and therapy” (Taylor 2002: 106–7), and to really contribute towards Orthodox revival under the conditions of a global religious market.

References

Sources

- Dobriyanov, Velichko. 1995. *Fenomenat Vanga* [The Vanga phenomenon]. Sofia: Sofia University 'Kl. Okhridski' Publisher.
- Filipov, Dimiter. 1998. *Lelja Vanga, svjatost i mudrost* [Aunt Vanga, Holiness and Wisdom]. Sofia: M&M Publisher.
- Fol, Alexander. 1990. *Politika i kultura v Drevna Trakija* [Politics and Culture in Ancient Thrace]. Sofia: Sofia University 'Kl. Okhridski' Publisher.
- Ganev, Nedelcho. 1993. *Phenomeni na Bulgaria* [Bulgaria's Phaenomena]. Sofia: Hristo Botev.
- Guide 1994 – *Gid na ekstrasensite v Bugarija, 1994* [The extrasensorial in Bulgaria. A Guide for 1994]. Sofia: Ekstrasens.
- Hajtov, Nikolaj 1999. *Dnevnic* [Memoirs/Journal], vols. 1–2. Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel.
- Kanev, Konstantin (Father). 1975. *Minaloto na selo Momčilovtsi, Smolyansko. Prinos kăm istorijata na Srednite Rodopi.* [The Past of the village of Momčilovtsi, Smolyan district. Contribution to the history of the Central Rhodopes.] Sofia: Othechestven Front Publishing House.
- Kanevski, Konstantin N. 2002. *Chudotvornoto ajazmo i paraklisite na Momčilovci.* Smoljan: ZEA Print.
- Kostadinova, Zheni. 1997. *Prorochestvata na Vanga* [Vanga's Prophecies]. Sofia: Trud Publisher.
- Kostadinova, Zheni. 1999. *Prorochestvata na Vanga 2. Za choveshkite sudbi.* [Vanga's Prophecies, 2. The Human Destinies] Sofia: Trud Publisher.
- Orbetsova, Vrabka. 1993. The field of psychotronic and alternative medicine in Bulgaria [in Bulgarian]. *Bulgarski Folkor* 5: 82–85.
- Ostrander, Sheila and Lynn Schroeder. 1971. *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain.* New York: Bantam Books.
- Paraškevov, Peter 1996. The Church St. Petka-the-Unifier at Rupite: between East Orthodoxy and Paganism [in Bulgarian]. In: Ilia Konev, Konstantin Dinchev, Cvetan Rakjovski and Ilia Nedin (eds.). *Sveti mesta na Balkanite.* Blagoevgrad: Southwestern University, 'Lice' Publisher, pp. 162–66.
- Sidorov, Valentin. 1995. *Ljudmila i Vanga* [Ljudmila and Vanga]. Sofia: 'Reporter' Publisher.
- Stoyanova, Krasimira. 1989. *Vanga.* Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel.
- Stoyanova, Krasimira. 2004. *Vanga: Istinata* [Vanga: the Truth]. Sofia: ABG Publisher.
- St. Panteleimon – The Orthodox Shrine of 'St. Martyr Panteleimon' at the town of Smolyan, 29 pages, sine anno, no place.
- Todorov, Todor St. 2006. *Rodopite: kulturen i ekoturizam* [The Rhodopes: cultural and eco-tourism]. Smolyan: ZEA Print.
- Tzvetkova, Bojka. 1998. *Vanga: zhivot za horata* [Vanga: Life for the others]. Sofia: Alisa MG Publisher.
- SAB 904 – State Archives of Bulgaria, Archives Fund Nr. 904, II.

Bibliography

Anastasova, Ekaterina. 2006. *Ethnicity, Tradition, Power: Studies on tradition* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: 'Marin Drinov' Academic Publisher.

Atanasova, Ivanka. 2004. Ljudmila Zhivkova and the Paradox of Ideology and Identity in Communist Bulgaria. *East European Politics and Societies* 18(2): 278–315.

Balikci, Asen. 1998. The “Bulgarian Ethnography” of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Some critical comments. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2: 121–25.

Barnes, Linda L. and Susan S. Sered (eds.). 2004. *Religion and Healing in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bax, Mart. 2000. Warlords, priests and the politics of ethnic cleansing: a case-study from rural Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23(1): 16–34.

Benovska, Milena. 1998. Political Myth and Religion. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2: 137–143.

Benovska-Săbkova, Milena. 1993. The Extrasense Phenomenon from the Folkloristic Point of View [in Bulgarian]. *Bulgarski Folklor* 5: 3–17.

Blum, Eva and Richard Blum. 1965. *Health and Healing in Rural Greece. A Study of Three Communities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot. 1991. *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*. Paris: Gallimard.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1971. Genèse et structure du champ religieux. *Revue française de sociologie* XII (2): 295–334.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977 [1972]. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1980. *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Minuit.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. Le champ religieux dans le champ de manipulation symbolique. In: Bourdieu, Pierre. *Les nouveaux clercs: Prêtres, pasteurs et spécialistes des relations humaines et de la santé*. Geneva: Labor & Fides, pp. 255–61.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. La dissolution du religieux, In: Bourdieu, Pierre. *Choses dites*. Paris: Minuit, pp. 117–123.

Broun, Janice. 1993. The Schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. *Religion, State and Society* 21(2): 207–220.

Broun, Janice. 2004. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church: the Continuing Schism and the Religious, Social and Political Environment. *Religion, State and Society* 32(3): 209–245.

Brown, Peter. 1981. *The Cult of the Saints*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Chadwick, Owen. 1993. *The Christian Church in the Cold War*. London: Penguin Books.

Christian, William A., Jr. 1991. Secular and Religious Responses of a Child's Potentially Fatal Illness. In: Eric Wolf (ed.). *Religious Regimes and State Formation: Perspectives from European Ethnology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 163–180.

- Christian, William A., Jr. 1996. *Visionaries. The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- Claverie, Elisabeth. 2003. *Les guerres de la Vierge: une anthropologie des apparitions*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Creed, Gerald. 1998. *Domesticating Revolution. From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Creed, Gerald. 2002. Economic Crisis and Ritual Decline in Eastern Europe. In: Chris Hann (ed.). *Postsocialism: Ideal, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*. London: Routledge, pp. 57–73.
- Danforth, Loring. 1989. *Firewalking and Religious Healing. The Anastenaria in Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dimov, Vencislav. 1994. 'Becoming' extrasens. Observations on the biographical narratives of the Bulgarian extra-sensorial. *Bălgarski folklor* 6: 57–65.
- Dragadze, Tamara. 1993. The domestication of religion under Soviet communism. In: Chris Hann (ed.). *Socialism. Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*. London: Routledge, pp. 148–156.
- Draganov, Minčo. 1968. *Religioznata psihika na balgarite* [The religious psyche of Bulgarians]. Sofia: Partizdat.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1964. *Les formes elementaires de la vie religieuse. Le systeme totemique en Australie*. (Fourth Edition). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Eldärov, Svetoslav. 2004. *Pravoslaviето na vojna. Balgarskata Pravoslavna Carkva I vojnite na Balgarija 1877–1945* [Orthodoxy in War: the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Bulgaria's Wars, 1877–1945]. Sofia: Voenno Izdatelstvo.
- Ganeva-Rajcheva, V. 1993. The Paranormal Phenomena and their Reflection in Bulgarian Culture [in Bulgarian]. *Bulgarski Folklor* 5: 18–32.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1984. Doctor and Saint. In: Akbar S. Ahmet and David M. Hart (eds.). *Islam in Tribal Societies from Atlas to the Indus*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 21–38.
- Hadzhijski, Ivan. 1974 [1938]. *Optimisticna teorija za nasija narod* [Optimistic theory for our nation]. In: Ivan Hadzhijski. *Sachinenija* [Works]. vol. I. Sofia: Balgarski Pisatel, pp. 45–99.
- Hann, Chris. 2000. Problems with the (de)privatization of religion. *Anthropology Today* 16(6): 14–20.
- Hart, Laurie K. 1992. *Time, Religion, and Social Experience in Rural Greece*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Hervieu-Léger, Daniele. 1993. *La Religion pour Mémoire*. Paris: Cerf.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics of the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
- Humphrey, Caroline. 1998. *Marx Went Away but Karl Stayed Behind*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Iliev, Ilia. 2000. The Social Construction of a Sainly Woman in Bulgaria. In: Adrienne Rubeli and Nina Vucenik (eds.). *A Captured Moment in Time. IWM Junior Fellows Conferences* 10, Vienna: IWM pp. 1–16. <http://www.iwm.at/publ-jvc/jc-10-03.pdf> (Accessed 11 June 2007).

Iliev, Iliia. 2001. Familie, Ideologie und Politik: Die Grossmutter in der städtischen Familie nach 1945. In: Ulf Brunnbauer and Karl Kaser (eds.). *Vom Nutzen der Verwandten. Soziale Netzwerke in Bulgarien (19. und 20. Jahrhundert)*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, pp. 89–114.

Ilić, Angela. 2005. On the Road towards Religious Pluralism? Church and State in Serbia. *Religion, State and Society* 33(4): 273–313.

Kaneff, Deema. 2002. Why people don't die 'naturally' any more: changing relations between 'the Individual' and 'the State' in post-socialist Bulgaria. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8: 89–105.

Kaneff, Deema. 2003. *Who Owns the Past? The Politics of Time in a 'Model' Bulgarian Village*. Berghahn Books: Oxford.

Kalkandzhieva, Daniela. 1997. *Balgarskata Pravoslavna Cărkva i dărzhavata, 1944–1953*. [Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the State, 1944–1953]. Sofia: Albatros.

Kalkandzhieva, Daniela. 2004. *Balgarskata Pravoslavna Cărkva i novijat Zakon za veroizpovedanijata* [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the New Denominations Act]. In: Ina Merdzhanova (ed.). *Religija i politika na Balkanite* [Religion and politics in the Balkans]. Silistra: Demos, pp. 148–181.

Kligman, Gail. 1988. *The Wedding of the Dead. Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

Koselleck, Reinhart. 1990. *Le future passé. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques*. Paris: Editions de l'EHESS.

Krasztev, Peter and Sabina Kerényi. 2001. Spirit Awakening at Sunrise. Petăr Dănov and the White Brotherhood: Attempting Interpretation. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 5: 79–100.

Lautman, Françoise (ed.). 1995. *Gestions religieuses de la santé*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1962. *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon.

Lindquist, Galina. 2001. Wizards, Gurus, and Energy-Information Fields: Wielding Legitimacy in Contemporary Russian Healing. *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 19(1): 16–28.

Lindquist, Galina. 2005. *Magic and Healing in Contemporary Russia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Ljubenova, Lisbet 1999. Ikonomiceski osnovi na carkovnija zhivot (1878–1920) [Economic background of the church life]. In: Georgi Bakalov et al. (eds.), *Religion and Church in Bulgaria*. Sofia: Gutenberg, pp. 178–89.

Lory, Bernard. 2005 [1989]. Un peuple naturellement athée? In: Bernard Lory. *Les Balkans: De la transition post-ottomane à la transition post-communiste*. Istanbul: Isis, pp. 329–334.

Luckmann, Thomas. 1967. *The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. New York: Macmillan.

Michel, Patrick. 1991. *Politics and religion in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Michel, Patrick. 1994. *Politique et religion. La grande mutation*. Paris: Albin Michel.

- Oshavkov Zhivko (ed.). 1970. *Procesât na preodoljavaneto na religijata v Bâlgarija. Sociologiĉesko izsledvane* [The process of outdying of religion in Bulgaria: A sociological study]. Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Publishing House.
- Nora, Pierre. 1986. Entre Mémoire et Histoire, la problématique des lieux. In: Pierre Nora. *Les Lieux de Mémoire. I. La République*. Paris: Gallimard, XVII–XLII.
- Payne, Daniel. 2003. The clash of civilization: the church of Greece, the European Union and the question of human rights. *Religion, State & Society* 31(3): 261–71.
- Piette, Albert. 1999. *L'activité religieuse en train de se faire*. Paris: Métailié.
- Potrata, Barbara. 2004. New Age, Socialism and Other Millenarianisms: Affirming and Struggling with (Post)socialism. *Religion, State and Society* 32(4): 365–79.
- Riis, Carsten. 2002. *Religion, Politics and Historiography in Bulgaria*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rogers, Douglas. 2005. The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism. *Religion, State and Society* 33(1): 3–9.
- Sabean, David Warren. 1997. *Power in the Blood. Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sadkowski, Konrad. 2001. *Catholic power and Catholicism as a component of modern Polish national identity, 1863–1918*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Seremetakis Nadia C. 1991. *The Last Word: Women, Death and Divination in Inner Mani*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Shankland, David. 2004. Modes of religiosity and the Legacy of Ernst Gellner. In: H. Whitehouse and J. Laidlaw (eds.). *Ritual and Memory. Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion*. Lanham: Altamira Press, pp. 31–48.
- Stewart, Charles. 1991. *Demons and the Devil. Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sugar, Peter. 1989. The Historical Role of Religious Institutions in Eastern Europe and Their Place in the Communist Party-State. In: Pedro Ramet (ed.). *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 42–58.
- Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 2002. *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Todorova-Pirgova, Iveta. 1993. Sorcery, Magic and Extrasense Séance: Ritual Expressions of the Notion of 'Two Worlds' and their Interpretation. *Bulgarski Folklor* 5: 56–68.
- Todorova-Pirgova, Iveta. 2003. *Bajanija i Magii* [Traditional healing rituals and magical practices]. Sofia: 'Marin Drinov' Academic Publisher.
- Turner, Victor. 1997. Religious Specialists. In: Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers (eds.). *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion. An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*. Toronto: Mayfield, pp. 78–85.

- Vălčinova, Galia. 1998. Ethnographie et folklore du religieux en Bulgaire: “un tango de Lenine”? *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2: 145–65.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 1998. Entre religion, tourisme et politique: la naissance du pèlerinage de Rupité, en Bulgarie. *Ethnologie Française* XXVIII(3): 396–405.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 1999. *Znepolski pohvali: lokalna religija i identičnost v Zapadna Bălgarija*. [Laudae Znepolensia: Local Religion and Identity in Western Bulgaria]. Sofia: ‘Marin Drinov’ Academic Publisher.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2000. ‘Visages nationaux’ du culte de sainte Parascève/Petka d’Epivatos: une approche historico-anthropologique. *Etudes Balkaniques* 2: 96–111.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2002. Orthodoxie et communisme dans les Balkans: réflexions sur le cas bulgare. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 119: 79–97.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2004. Constructing the Bulgarian Pythia: Intersecting religion, memory, and history in the seer Vanga. In: Deema Kaneff, Frances Pine and Haldis Haukanes (eds.). *Memory, Politics and Religion. The Past Meets the Present in Europe*. Münster: LIT Verlag, pp. 179–198.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2004a. Folkloristic, Ethnography or Anthropology: Bulgarian Ethnology at the Crossroads. *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe* 4(2): 2–18.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2005. Vanga, ‘la Pythie bulgare’: idées et usages de l’Antiquité en Bulgarie socialiste. *Dialogues d’Histoire Ancienne* 31(1): 93–127.
- Valtchinova, Galia. 2006. *Balkan visionaries and prophetesses in the 20th century* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: The University of Sofia Press.
- Van de Port, Mattijs. 1998. *Gypsies, Wars & Other Instances of the Wild. Civilisation and its Discontents in a Serbian Town*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Verdery, Katherine 1991. *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Verdery, Katherine 1996. *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Verdery, Katherine. 1999. *The political lives of dead bodies. Reburial and postsocialist change*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Whitehouse, Harvey. 2000. *Arguments and Icons: Divergent modes of religiosity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.