

Overview and Acknowledgments

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CATHOLIC PILGRIMAGE and the POLITICS and PRAGMATICS of PLACE-MAKING in EASTERN EUROPE

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Catholic Pilgrimage and the Politics and Pragmatics of Place-Making in Eastern Europe



Marc Roscoe Loustau is Managing Editor of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* and a Catholics & Cultures contributor. As a scholar of religious studies in the context of personal, social, and economic change, his research has focused on Catholicism in Eastern Europe where, after decades of official state atheism, there has been a prominent resurgence of religion in public life. Loustau has taught courses at the College of the Holy Cross on contemporary global Catholicism. He holds a Th.D. from Harvard Divinity School.

The Editors of the *Journal of Global Catholicism* are pleased to publish the second of two Special Issues featuring material from the conference, Lived Catholicism from the Balkans to the Baltics, held at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, Hungary in March 2018. Co-sponsored by Pázmány Péter Catholic University and the Catholics & Cultures program at College of the Holy Cross, the conference featured presentations by more than thirty scholars studying aspects of Catholicism in the region stretching from the Baltics to the Balkans. Ksenia Trofimova presented a version of her article, “Minor Letnica: (Re) Locating the Tradition of Shared Worship in North Macedonia,” along with papers published in our Winter 2020 Special Issue titled, “Hungarian Catholicism: Living Faith across Diverse Social and Intellectual Contexts.”

In this issue, Trofimova is joined by three scholars who conduct fieldwork at national and multi-ethnic Catholic shrines located in Romania and Hungary. Zsofia Lovei, an art historian and ethnographer based in Budapest, Hungary, writes about the Hungarian national shrine at Csíksomlyó in the Szekler region of Transylvania, Romania. István Povedák, Associate Professor at Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, Hungary, draws on individual and team ethnographic research at Csatka, Hungary, where a Catholic shrine now hosts a major annual pilgrimage gathering for members of the ethnic Roma community. Finally, Erika Vass, who curates a branch of the Hungarian Open Air Museum serving the Transylvanian Hungarian minority community, writes about the Radna shrine in Romania’s Banat region where Catholics have long venerated the Virgin Mary regardless of their nationality and native language.

The authors take up this issue’s core theme of place-making as both a strategic political and also contingent pragmatic process, and move outward to highlight the forms of lived ethnicity that emerge at Catholic shrines. In the fields of history, anthropology, and religious studies, the region called Eastern Europe has long been a privileged site for studying nationalism as a framework for mobilizing ethnicity in political movements and policymaking. In this Special Issue, the authors explore how Catholic devotional practices give rise to both marked and muted performances of national identity. The authors’ use of ethnographic participant

observation provides unique access to the minute and subtle social interactions in which pilgrims negotiate ethnicity as a way of perceiving the world. They reveal that pilgrimage as a ritual practice is contingently related to pilgrims' perception that people, places, and rituals are distinctively "Roma," "Hungarian," "German," and so on.

Whether and how one perceives communities, sites, and devotions is worked out in pilgrims' socially, politically, and historically situated interactions. For instance, Povedák writes that, "Roma and Gadjo [non-Roma] pilgrims are still separated today, and even have different attitudes toward certain places and rites of pilgrimage." Just the same, both Roma and non-Roma pilgrims often have opportunities to become aware that non-Roma visitors continue to make the annual pilgrimage to Csátka. Non-Roma pilgrims, in particular, utilize categories of consumption and devotion to express their historical awareness of Csátka's changing ethnic profile and work on their experience in light of new and emerging ritual practices they observe among their fellow pilgrims.

Trofimova's article also opens a window onto the lived experience of Catholics and Muslims at worship together. Her article demonstrates the variety of pilgrims' responses to rituals that have become identified with either Christianity and Islam. These negotiations far exceed reductive tropes in pilgrimage studies that describe either *communitas* or conflictual relations at shrines. While some Muslim pilgrims complain privately that shrine officials only offer yellow candles for sale—white candles are associated with devotion to Muslim saints and yellow with Christian saints—most Muslim visitors consider it more important to perform the ritual act of lighting a candle than publicly complain. Others even go so far as to interpret yellow candles as a way to honor the shrine's Catholic identity. These choices and explanations emerge in the process of contingent and situationally determined negotiations:

For a number of Muslim pilgrims, the use of yellow (i.e. Christian) candles serves as a kind of "tribute to" the rules that are set by the "owners" of the place. For others, the choice does not matter since this holy place unites all devotees in their conversation with God and the Virgin Mother, and implies blurring of the boundaries and devaluing of their visual markers.





Trofimova calls these negotiations a form of “lived ecumenism” and provides a compelling description of the ways that Catholics and Muslims weigh the consequences of potential conflicts while engaging in shared and divergent ritual practices at the Catholic shrine to Our Lady of Letnica in Skopje, Macedonia.

From the cover:
Women pilgrims wear
head scarves to Mass
at the shrine at Radna.
Photo by Erika Vass.

Lovei conducted fieldwork at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site, a Catholic shrine located in an area of Transylvania settled by members of a Szekler Hungarian ethnic minority. Each year on the holiday of Pentecost, over 100,000 Hungarian pilgrims from Hungary, Transylvania, and around the world travel to this shrine. Border changes following World War I integrated Csíksomlyó and the surrounding area into an expanded Romanian nation-state. Noting this history, Lovei highlights the collective existential experience of loss and grief that Magyars on both sides of the border feel as a result of the post-War border changes. This loss leaves a profound mark on pilgrims’ experiences and colors the emotional dynamics of their performance of Hungarian national identity:

It is worthwhile to consider that the annual journey and return to Csíksomlyó also acts as a festival of grieving and rejoicing, of cognitively purifying the perils of the past, of accepting the somber reality of divorce and alienation from the Motherland, as per the Act of Trianon following World War I.

Historical dislocation and loss, according to Erika Vass, are also central to the pilgrimage to the Catholic shrine at Radna in Romania's Banat region. The Banat region was once home to a significant German-speaking Catholic population. But the vast majority of this community left Romania beginning in the 1970s. By making a pilgrimage to Radna, they maintain their connection to the sacred center of their homeland. "Besides their religious motivations," Vass writes, "these pilgrimages focus on visualizing or temporarily recreating these now extinct communities. The Germans who had moved to Germany from Sântana (Romania) in the 1970s symbolically rebuilt the pilgrimage site of Radna in their new home."

This Special Issue comes as we are in the initial stages of transitioning the JGC to accept individual submissions of articles. These pieces give even greater momentum to that effort. Indeed, the articles' quality indicates that they would stand on their own in future issues of the JGC. My gratitude goes to Mathew Schmalz, the JGC's Founding Editor, and Thomas Landy, Director of the Catholics & Cultures program at College of the Holy Cross. Special thanks also go to Danielle Kane, Associate Director for Communications at the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J. Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture and Pat Hinchliffe, Assistant at the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J. Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture.



Figures for sale among the merchant tents in Csatka. Photo by István Povedák.