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## Smells Like *kurban* Spirit Ritual Sensoryscapes, Social Change and Ethnographic Memory

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### Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the potentialities of sensory ethnography and anthropology in the field of the Balkan studies, through the case of the *kurban*, a ritual practice endowed with a rich sensory environment. At once perceived from *emic* and *etic* perspectives, the sensoryscape of the *kurban* is addressed at the crossroad of ethnographic memory, ritual performance and social change, through a set of examples mainly drawn from Bulgarian fieldwork experiences. Taking the sensory dimensions as revelatory of the contemporary dynamics of the ritual, I argue that social transformations imply or correlate sensory transformations. The inextricable link between social and cultural categories, and sensory and cognitive perceptions, leads me to focus on different complementary notions such as experience, ambiance, relational ecology, attention and memory. Beyond the case of the *kurban*, the article finally addresses some of the complex issues raised by sensory approaches in ethnography and anthropology.

### Introduction: on searching and sensing

Sensory approaches now cover a wide spectre of theoretical and methodological proposals, still often innovative and challenging for the practice of ethnography and anthropology. In this rich field, one may at least distinguish an *anthropology of senses* (exploring the cultural and social construction of the different senses, Howes, Classen 2013; Pink 2009), a *sensitive or sensate anthropology* (focusing on affects and sensibilities in the fieldwork relationship, Laplantine 2005, 2018; Gélard 2016) and a *sensory or sensorial anthropology* (considering the inquiry as an embodied experience which the researcher not only cannot escape, but is the touchstone through his/her own presence). Albeit related, the sensory dimension isn't reducible to reflexivity, as a conscious attempt to examine how doing research depends on the positionality of the researcher, but requires "at-tuning anthropologists (...) to how they could use their own bodies and senses as

means of ethnographic analysis” (Howes 2013)<sup>1</sup>. In this perspective, sensory approaches fostered a renewal of ethnographic methodologies, through proposals concerning “sensorial fieldwork” (Robben, Slukka 2007: part VIII) or “sensory ethnography” (Pink 2009).

In the field of Balkan studies, sensory perspectives still remain under-represented, despite significant contributions (for example for the Greek case Seremetakis 1993, 1994, 2019, or studies devoted to one specific sense, like Panopoulos on hearing, Sutton on tasting 2001), and a commonly shared (while criticized) idea of a correlation between Balkan cultural identities and sensory singularities. Thus, highly “sensory” social practices such as eating, drinking, dancing, singing or playing music, have been associated with notions like “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld 2007a) and “body politic” (Cowan 1990), also contributing to a particularization of the concerned societies. However, senses and perceptions have mainly been addressed through an anthropology of emotions or sentiments (for the Greek case, see for example Vernier 1991, Papataxiarchis 1994) as social and cultural performances, which they are for sure, but not only. In short, sensory experiences have often been reduced to affects, emotions, feelings or sentiments as moral categories<sup>2</sup>, and apprehended as *meaning* rather than *perceiving*, *sense* rather than *senses*<sup>3</sup>. One of the scopes of sensory anthropology is not to deny, but to complement (and may be go beyond) this association of perception and senses to emotions and moral affects, by addressing the ways they construct embodied, cognitive and environmentalized experiences. As illustrate the present issues of *Ethnologia Balkanica*, if the field of emotions and affects still predominates, more recent attempts to tackle sensorial issues are to be found in studies concerning for example the sensory city (Slavčeva, Petrova, Zlatkova 2019; Zlatkova 2020; Bajič 2020; Abram 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> David Howes (2013), *The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies*, <http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/the-expanding-field-of-sensory-studies/>.

<sup>2</sup> A classical case being the couple honour and shame, a core notion in the making of the anthropology of the Mediterranean widely apprehended in *moral* rather than *sensory* terms.

<sup>3</sup> See for example the place of eating and drinking (especially meat and alcohol) in Herzfeld’s study on Cretan manhood (1985): in short, we know that Cretan shepherds consider eating and drinking as meaningful practices, or translate social relationships into edibility and drinkability (for instance through the metaphor of “eating” as “stealing”, p. 44, or the importance of meat and wine in masculine sociability and commensality, p. 126, and several other pages concerning the dietary uses, pp. 123–136 and elsewhere in the book), but we don’t know what they *perceive* and *taste* while eating and drinking – as if meat and wine had no taste. These examples concern especially food habits because they particularly arise in this ethnographic context (and convey more obviously sensory as well as social aspects), but one may consider every other kind of social activity under its “sensory” light.



Woodsmoke and *kurban čorba*: smells like *kurban* spirit (Olivier Givre 2015).

The purpose of this article is to expose and explore some potentialities of the sensory approaches in ethnography and anthropology, through a revised ethnographic perspective of my own fieldwork experience of the *kurban*, a ritual practice widely known in the Balkans, and endowed with a rich sensory environment, as I will develop in the further pages. From and beyond the depiction of what I call the sensoryscape<sup>4</sup> of the *kurban*, my purpose is double-folded: explore my own personal sensory insights as an ethnographer experiencing fieldwork, and provide a sensory account of the *kurban* as a ritual performance revelatory of social change. As my first ethnographic steps in Bulgaria were marked by the experience of the *kurban*, which would become the subject of my doctoral research, it will lead me to address the relationships between senses, memory and fieldwork. Then I will address some sensory dimensions of the ritual in its contemporary dynamics, arguing that social transformations imply or correlate sensory transformations. Throughout the article, the inextricable link between social and cultural categories, and sensory and cognitive perceptions, will lead me to focus on different complementary notions such as experience and ambi-

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<sup>4</sup> Even if I come to focus myself on specific senses, I prefer this term to “sensescapes” (Howes 2013), implicitly departing between different senses.

ance, but also relational ecology, attention or memory<sup>5</sup>. Beyond fieldwork examples, the article will finally address some of the complex issues raised by sensory approaches in ethnography and anthropology.

### **(Auto)ethnographic appetizers: getting into the *kurban***

*Kurban* is a ritual practice particularly common in the Balkans, involving the offering, sacrifice, cooking, sharing and eating of devoted animals for different kinds of purposes and in different occasions (Popova 1995; Givre 2006; Hristov, Sikimic 2007). Often related to religious celebrations (such as St George's day and other Orthodox Christian feasts, or Muslim rituals such as *kurban bajram*, *akika* or *adak*, etc.), *kurban* is also a sequence performed in a large series of occasions (for example foundation of a new house, recovery after a sickness or an accident, sometimes before entering army, starting a business or making a travel, etc.). Moreover, through its festive and social features (collective preparation and meals, benevolence, commitment, solidarity, etc.), *kurban* is a component of a familiar and local religiosity, a common element of the village or small-town life in particular. While not reducible to it, *kurban* in Bulgaria tends to be a part of a local (and mainly rural) landscape through its connection to specific cult places and practices, or with skills associated to pastoral or rural activities, for example animal slaughtering. Making *kurban* classically involves a full material and symbolic environment, from a network of worship places (monasteries, churches, chapels, *obroci* and other sacral *topoi* as *ayazma*) to a range of devices required for all the concrete operations (cauldrons, axes, hooks, portals, etc.).

All these dimensions are quite familiar in many ethnographic accounts of the ritual, emphasizing its social and cultural, religious and symbolic features. While acknowledging their relevance in terms of description, representation and interpretation of the *kurban*, I argue that they lack a deeper sensory and perceptive viewpoint. Indeed, as much as *kurban* may be seen as a full ritual cycle in a space-time nutshell, from the living animal to the food, and a social performance including religious, economic and even political dimensions, in a sensory perspective it covers a wide spectrum of affects and emotions, but also perceptions and sensations. Moreover, these perceptions and sensations doesn't engage only the people concerned by and committed with the ritual, but the researcher as far as he or she embodies the experience as well as other protagonists (even if in a different manner), along with multiple social, cultural, moral and of course

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<sup>5</sup> Which also emphasize the relationships between sensory perception and ecological interactions (in a wide sense of the term ecology, i. e. not only natural), and the connection between experience and sensoriality.

sensory dimensions<sup>6</sup>. One ground-breaking issue of sensory ethnography (or at least the sensory experience of ethnography) is to tackle the presumed distinction between *emic* and *etic* postures, because in a sensory fieldwork, one relates not only on the other's perceptions but on one's own perceptions, as a full element of understanding and coexisting. Whatever the form it takes, this sharing of sensorialities addresses a core anthropological question: what does it mean and how to "feel like" and "with" others?

Thus, a good way to enter into sensory issues is to start from the researcher's own experience, and firstly the assumption that a significant part of what we keep in mind about fieldwork experiences is actually kept in body. Besides the explicit means of doing research (through notes, diaries, interviews, observations, lectures, etc.) and all the modalities of immersive experience (for example comfort and discomfort, excitation and annoyance, etc.), we frequently use to reenact fieldwork situations, even under the shape of *a priori* non-significant details and indicia, or through the remembrance of recurring, "near-to-nothing", *offscreen* (Laplantine 2015) perceptions. In my opinion, these intuitions and perceptions are insufficiently apprehended through analytical, discursive and even reflexive practices, whose premisses still stick to the postulate that the knowing subject has the capacity to extract itself from the world he or she lives in – even for the sake of self-understanding. Sensory methodologies and theories thus appear as a path to (self)knowledge through the reevaluation of the notions of experience and experimentation<sup>7</sup>, but also relational ecology (Ingold 2000) and attention or awareness (Crawford 2016).

To sum up, paying attention to perceptions tells a lot about ethnography as an embodied experience, through which we learn not only to understand but to perceive. It also illustrates how our perceptive skills (or disabilities) orient significantly our interpretive frames. It reveals the place of memory in the process of reenacting fieldwork. It highlights and questions the explicit or implicit (but also variable) hierarchies between the "meaningless" and the "meaningful", "senseless" and the "senseful". Sensory approaches also add a specific value to a non-fixist understanding of social dynamics, through the acknowledgement of

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<sup>6</sup> Among which the personal background and motivations, social status, gender, age, moral sensibility, aesthetics, singular inclinations (curiosity, interests, attractivity, passions, or reluctance, discomforts, etc.) and all his/her body as a perceptive and sensory *locus*.

<sup>7</sup> Exploring the sensory and perceptive dimensions of the fieldwork experience doesn't exclude rationality nor obliterate understanding, as if one would fall in a dark and bottomless pit of inchoation. On the contrary, I argue that it is the obliteration of the sensory and perceptive dimensions that sometimes recovers the deepness and richness of the ethnographic experience under a veil of false clarity, which betrays a particularly antiscientific fear of the unknown.



An ordinary connection to animal life and death (Madjare, *Spasovden* – Ascension Day, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1996 – Olivier Givre).

the everchanging nature of perceptive life. Both reiterative and transformative, routinary and disruptive, persistent and ephemeral, perceptions and sensations form the core experience of time and duration, as our own body-minds are themselves constantly mutating. It raises important issues about the ways personal and social changes, contexts and events are embodied (even biophysically) along different sensory regimes depending on individual but also collective lines (generational for example). As I will try to show through the example of the *kurban*, senses and perceptions may be a particularly relevant expression of the symbolic and social complexity of a ritual “milieu”, but also a measure instrument of the individual and social experiences of uncertainties, mutations, crisis, transitions, ruptures, upheavals.

It is worth admitting that part of my first interest for the *kurban* was a kind of attraction for the exotic experience of a “European-rooted” sacrificial tradition. My curiosity for such practices, deeply rooted in the classical anthropological literature, was not exempt of a semi-conscious and naïve fascination for their aura of ritual genuineness<sup>8</sup>. The ethnographic experience of *kurban* led me to deconstruct the usual visions of sacrifice as a ritual act usually associated with otherness in time (for example ancient Greece) and space (for example African religions). My epistemological frames also considerably evolved, start-

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<sup>8</sup> If not a mix of anthropological mythologies (purity and danger, paroxysm and strangeness, etc.) one has to deconstruct but which play an undeniable role in our fieldwork choices.



Trying to help (modestly) by inflating the skin (Kârcali, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – Olivier Givre).

ing from symbolic and moral perspectives on the anthropology of religion and ritual (searching for meaning and structures), then turning to political and social dimensions (addressing social change through rituality) and more recently attempting to see the ritual under the light of an “animal turn” (human and non-human relationships, animal death). But apart these theoretical shifts, one core point has to be stressed: doing fieldwork on a ritual such as *kurban* involved my full sensory apparatus, and was challenging on an affective and emotional perspective, one of the most obvious reasons being the confrontation with animal slaughtering. Being neither familiar with animal death, nor shocked *a priori* by it, experiencing *kurban* confronted me on that point to the cognitive dissonance between reluctance and tacit acceptance, rather common in subjectivities shaped by the context of industrial and urban societies.

### *Remembering fieldwork from a sensory perspective*

The decision to focus my scientific attention on this topic played a significant role in my sensory awareness or availability, as I consciously trained myself to capture any significant detail, but also to develop “methodological defences” (Devereux 1980) in order to prevent discomfort or anxiety.<sup>9</sup> In other terms, the

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<sup>9</sup> In this perspective, taking notes or photographs for example do not only consist in a data collection but act as both an epistemic and a sensory filter.

ethnographic position provides a sensory and perceptive setting for the embodiment of the experience. The production and the selection of these perceptions are at once conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary, depending on several criteria such as the level of awareness devoted to one's own affects, the degree of interpretive relevance accorded to them, and a plural and complex set of feelings ranging from comfort to discomfort, pleasure to disgust, familiarity to strangeness, etc. Moreover, the sensory perception of the fieldwork is everything but fixed and homogeneous: putting apart our changing moods and states of the body-mind, it depends on the degree of habituation and familiarity to the context, as one improves ethnographic skills but also elaborates interpretive capacities and sensory affordances. Here again, the reiterative dimension of the research and its memory elaboration, play a core role. What impressed or marked us at first glance may become secondary or common over the course of the research, as well as primarily unnoticed perceptions gain reality or significance when referred to themselves evolving interpretive frames.

For example, my very first fieldnotes insisted on the visual disposition and display of the *kurban* (places – the church and its yard, furnitures and material items, actions, etc.). My point here is that it was, on a methodological point of view, neither necessary nor arbitrary, but related to the frames of what was to be *perceived* or not, in that specific context and according to the both sensory and interpretive skills I had or not (for example linguistic abilities at that time). The sequencing of the ethnographic experience is equally fundamental: this very first incursion was made in the midst of the morning, as the participants were about to cook the *kurban čorba*, finishing to clean the carcasses, cutting the meat and vegetables, gathering other ingredients in huge cauldrons. The church was another hot spot, with a continuous flow of villagers (mostly women) coming in and out, bringing *kolivo*<sup>10</sup> and searching the blessing of the Pope. We<sup>11</sup> thus met mostly relax and available villagers, waiting for the festive part of the ritual and the distribution of the meal after a long day of work, and what I kept in mind was this ambiance of social gathering, leisure and pleasure, under the sunny sky of the village of Raduil (Rila mountain).

Even if the day was ethnographically very rich, I was frustrated because we “missed” what appeared to me as the most important event of the ritual: the sacrifice. But I also remember how pleasant this first experience was compared to the second one, in another village where we arrived at dawn for attending the sacrifice. Preparing themselves for a long working day in a fresh morning, a

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<sup>10</sup> Wheat-based preparation with sweet ingredients – dry grapes, sugar, etc. – for the memory of the deceased.

<sup>11</sup> Performed in July 1995, this five-weeks fieldwork training involved three French students under the guidance of the late Assia Popova.

bunch of men were parking sheep behind the church, waiting for other men (and sheep) to come. Neither concerned nor enthusiastic about our presence, they started the slaughtering without unnecessary words and ritual details. Some of the animals were bleating or resisted, while the first ones, barely dead, were already suspended to hooks for the scorching, the cutting up, the chopping and the cleaning. It left me a global impression of precipitation, roughness and a will to get rid of a boring duty as fast as possible. Above all, the accumulation of blood, shit, liquids, guts, dirt, skins, screams and other butchering noises (axes, knives, inflation of the skins, etc.) provided a totally different sensoryscape of the *kurban*, at once unpleasant and associated to the register of (dirty) work rather than religion.

*From “near-to-nothing” perceptions to “all inclusive” experience*

Through these *ex-post* remembrances, I emphasize the gap between the imagined and intellectualized elaboration of the fieldwork (before, during and after the ritual in this case), and its lived experience as a dense amount of more or less voluntary actions, flowing and multiple perceptions, variation of rhythms and intensities, ambiances and moods. For example, I remember how, during one of the many *kurbani* I attended, I felt at once actively taking pictures and hiding behind my camera, capturing even the slightest and toughest moments of the ritual. The ethnographic position provided me a good reason to watch what I was seeing, and to domesticate sensations through methodological mediations (taking pictures for example), allowing to select and make sense. On the same occasion, I remember an anecdote which illustrates the place of “near-to-nothing” sensory details: getting close to a man slashing the intestines of a sheep, my right leg was streaked by a jet of feces, causing stains on my pants which would never fully disappear even after several washings. These tiny stains acted as a permanent reminder of the fieldwork, at once encapsulating the whole context of the ritual and my singular experience of it, in a kind of Proustian evocation. I argue that, far from being trivial or secondary, this kind of small perceptions should be taken into account because they question the cognitive experience of research, as an incorporation of an infinite range of thick and thin sensations.

Voluntarily partial, these evocations aim at underlining the fact that the fieldwork experience lies on an infinite series of details, sometimes almost imperceptible and always singular. These variable, dynamic and transformative dimensions of the sensory experience reflect the “modal” character of anthropology (Laplantine 2005) but also its dependency on ambiances, themselves subjective. As basic and ordinary as they seem, these considerations nonetheless call for a deeper understanding of the ways to integrate the full sensory experience into the making of the fieldwork inquiry, but also its deeply transforma-

tive and polymorphous character. In this perspective, sensory approaches challenge the sometime normative scientific conventions delineating the intimate perceptions from the social representations, and reducing the heterogenous and ephemeral variations of perceptions to a coherent and homogenous account. In other terms, it helps anthropology to assume a dialectic complementarity (rather than opposition) between “strong, rich and solid” scientific *data* and “weak, poor and risky” stuffs (Ingold 2018: 32).

A sensory and multisensory ethnography requires the involvement of the researcher him or herself, and puts the accent on knowing by doing and by sharing or coexperiencing. It implies giving a legitimate place to the expression of one’s own perceptions, not only in a reflexive perspective but in the process of research itself, based on the assumption that one is permanently environmentalized and environmentalizing, i. e. involved in a common world. For the example of the *kurban*, I can only rely on personal memories as far as I didn’t apply such methodologies at the time I was doing fieldwork, except under the form of classical participant observation. Once again, my awareness was designed around what was deemed as significant for me at that time. Besides sight, occupying a privileged part of the ethnographic sensory apparatus through the place devoted to observation, and hearing as both ambiance (soundscapes) and meaning (communication), what I remember are tastes (pleasant or not, familiar or unusual) and textures (depending on the meal but also the “table manners”, for example picking pieces of meat with the fingers), smells (from the raw fragrance of boiled intestines to the bucolic perfume of woodsmoke) and sometimes touch (for example while helping at cutting still warm meat). One confronts here to the cultural dimensions of sensations, and the relativity of the judgements associated with them, according to socially-constructed personal dispositions and backgrounds. For instance, picking up grilled meat with the fingers in a collective plate is a sign of commensality and reciprocity, but can be perceived as uneasy or even transgressive of one’s own eating habits.

### **Main anthropological dish: sensory insights and/as moral values**

Besides the own experience of the ethnographer, one of the main stakes of a sensory approach in anthropology remains the outlining of the perceptive and felt dimensions of the social and cultural life, and reversely the social and cultural construction of perception and sensation. The *kurban* may be apprehended through a multiplicity of sensory evocations, mainly from taste to smell (“on

*St George's day, the whole village smells smoke*<sup>12</sup>), but also sight, audition and touch. Sensoriality expresses and displays social and cultural *habitus*, for example through the ability to cope with animals, or the transmission of tastes and cooking skills. Furthermore, the ritual engages a whole sensoryscape not reducible to specific senses, ranging from animal presence or heat of the wood-fire under the cauldrons, to festive ambiances (including noisy and colourful *panajri*) and ritual performances. Making *kurban* puts a light on the incorporation and embodiment of a sensory religiosity (including again all senses) strongly connected with localness, forms of sociability and environmental inputs in the strongest meaning of the term (i.e. not only “natural” environment). This ecology of the ritual includes its spatial and temporal characteristics, as well as its place as a specific kind of meal in a wider ritual food system<sup>13</sup>, which also comprises calendar organization and rhythmicity. *Kurban* echoes the religion-based regulations of food prescriptions and proscriptions, delineating what can be eaten or not (for example during Fast), or which kind of food is suitable to which saint (for example *sveti* Georgi and lamb, *sveti* Nikolaj and fish). In particular, the spacetime coherence of the *kurban* is signified by statements like “*kurban* must not be kept”, implying a full sequencing of the ritual from animal to consumption, and making it an “edible chronotope” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004).

Thus, saints may have specific tastes, such as the grilled lamb (*čeverme*) for St George, the *riben* (fish) *kurban* of St Nicholas or the *fasul* (beans) *kurban* reserved to Fast. My point here is to suggest that all these moral prescriptions and proscriptions goes along with sensory insights and statements, for example that “fasting makes healthier, lighter and better”<sup>14</sup> or that *kurban* plays a therapeutic role. On a moral plan, *kurban* is involved in a set of beneficial activities, for the individual as well as the collective, both spiritually and physically, through blessings (reciting *tekbir* – consecration to Allah – or “reading over” the meal by the pope) and giving/receiving (both being credited with virtues) actions. Making and eating *kurban* is frequently perceived as a both therapeutic or healing and votive act, part of a whole sacral regulation system (“*za zdrave*” – health, “*za bereket*” – fortune, “*za kâsmet*” – chance). This status of a simultaneous-

<sup>12</sup> A sentence often heard: even if one finds *kurban* during the whole ritual year in the Christian orthodox context, St George (Gergiovden, celebrated on 23<sup>rd</sup> April or 6<sup>th</sup> May depending on the calendar) is deemed as the first annual *kurban* with lamb, associated with the springtime newborn lambs and the returning of the pastoral life, and one of the most practiced in the family due to its closeness to Easter celebration.

<sup>13</sup> Among which *Koliva* (funerary meal, boiled wheat with fruits, honey, etc.), bread, eggs, *šeker bajram* (distribution of sweet foods celebrating the end of the Ramadan), and also the funerary custom of deposing food, alcohol, sometime coffee, cigarette, etc. on the grave for *Zadušnica*, and many other food ritual practices.

<sup>14</sup> For the example of such dietary etiquettes in Renaissance Bulgaria (Gavrilova 1999: 81).

ly sacred and safe food was best encapsulated in a formula heard during one of my first fieldworks: “we pray while eating”. A taste of devotion corroborated by countless affirmations about the “incomparable taste” of the *kurban* and its gustative as well as sanitary and moral qualities: “there is no better food”, “it’s good for health and spirit”. These considerations concern every kind of *kurban*, from the most elaborated recipe (*čorba* with plenty of ingredients) to the simplest one (only boiled meat barely salted), often deemed as pure (*čist*) or dry (*suh*)<sup>15</sup>.

Among the sensory dimensions of the sacrifice, the acts of slaughtering and eating deserve a special attention, as they are frequently pointed out as mandatory and highly performative. “For the *kurban*, blood must be shed”, and one still finds well-known customs using blood as a therapeutic or prophylactic stuff, for example by putting a blood stain on the children forehead. The sacrifice itself involves a wide range of performative acts, connected to affects, emotions and sensations. Among different expressions heard for qualifying the sacrificial skills, one of the most sensorial was having “light hand” (*leka rāka*), used by a Turkish *kasap* (slaughterer): it meant the capacity to act both smoothly and firmly, with sure gestures and a constant care not to harm the animal. The ability to do the sacrifice properly is the privilege of masters (*majstori*), acknowledged and trusted for their skills, and of particular significance when the sacrifice is delegated, i. e. appointed to a relevant person.<sup>16</sup> Other statements mention technical criteria (sharp knife, quick and unique cutting gesture), moral and behavioural qualities (softness, quietness, seriousness), and the mix of desire, good will and even pleasure expressed by the word *merak*. All these skills and qualities are associated not only with social or religious virtues, but with sensory dimensions<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, one important issue is the transformation of the social,

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<sup>15</sup> The most rudimentary form I experienced being a pack of mutton fat (*loj*) served in a plastic glass! Beyond its anecdotal character, this example is indicative of the complex status of fat in sacrificial rituals and food habits in general, both culinary and sensory. Associated with richness and health, fat is also a core component of the sacrificial smells reserved to the supernatural powers in Ancient Greece or in the Old Testament (where it is often compared to incense, Connybeare 1901: 109). One of the criteria for the choice of a sheep is to palp its tail and esteem its fatness.

<sup>16</sup> In the Muslim context, this kind of mandated (or proxy) sacrifice is designed by the term *vekalet*, an authorization to perform a sacral action in the name and for the sake of someone else. For example, the Great Mecca Pilgrimage can be performed by a third. Widely mobilized in the ordinary practice of sacrifice, the *vekalet* mechanism is also used under renewed forms in the cases of sacrifices made at a distance for humanitarian reasons (Givre 2016, 2017b).

<sup>17</sup> Even if one finds of course counter-examples of “careless” and “unsensitive”, or even “harmful” practices. Same, attested slaughtering skills may not be strictly associated with religious virtues.

technical but also sensory sphere of the ritual, also attested in other fieldworks on sacrifice in France or Turkey (Franck, Gardin, Givre 2016; Givre 2017a, 2017b). In particular, skills and tastes are submitted to ruptures of transmission, linked with the transformations of socioenvironmental frames: it is not rare to hear constataions about the “lack of skills” of certain slaughterers, if not the disappearance of the *know-how*<sup>18</sup>.

The St George *kurban* (6<sup>th</sup> of May) that I attended in Kârcali in 2015 illustrates these points strikingly: performed the day before (i. e. the 5<sup>th</sup>), the slaughtering was made by B., a young Turkish man from a surrounding village and his cousin, on the explicit demand of the Pope, explaining that “nobody can or want to do it in the church. Now only Turks know how to slaughter properly. B. has already done that for us, he’s very competent and I trust him”. Observing and modestly helping B. and his cousin, I was indeed stroke by the mix of attention and self-confidence he put in his gestures, firmly seizing an animal by the legs without brutality, carefully but resolutely cutting the throat and bleeding, then “cleaning” the corpse. A skilful job, obviously incorporated a long time ago, reenacted many times and shaped by both know-how and self-knowledge. In this kind of *praxis*, the religious *hexis* provides an implicit performative frame (for example mumbling the *tekbir*, hiding the knife from the eyes, briefly caressing the dying animal), rather than a strict model. It itself becomes a *know-how* and a part of the *sensorium*, interwoven with multiple other relevant qualities for the *kurban*, such as localness, trustworthiness and *merak* (which should be recognized by others, far beyond a purely individual desire)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> *Kurban* may also be a scene for displaying (and also despising) technical ability, especially as it is performed (and thus judged) collectively. During a fieldwork in Istanbul for the 2014 *Kurban Bajram*, the different contexts of the ritual performance (self-organization, institutionally managed, etc.) were also indicative of distinction lines along amateur/professional or inapt/skilled oppositions, going along with more sensory or perceptual qualifications (dirty/clean, ugly/shapely or even danger/control, see Givre 2017a).

<sup>19</sup> A case of the well attested (and sometimes culturalized as “Balkanic”) religious coexistence in the everyday life, this example illustrates also a loosely but real tendence to perceive the sacrifice as a “Muslim” skill. A point which would need a wide comparative analysis: many examples drawn from France and a lot of other contexts point out a specific Muslim care and ability for the slaughtering, due to the persistence of the sacrificial tradition and its embodiment as a masculine virtue or skill, learnt and transmitted from childhood and seen as a symbol of male maturity, especially for a family head (Givre 2006). This Muslim ability for the sacrifice is even turned into arguments for a faith-based animal wellbeing, opposed to the sanitary and juridical norms of animal killing in France, or on the contrary valued in official veterinary discourses in Sudan (see Franck, Gardin, Givre op. cit.).

### *Contested tastes and conflicting senses*

Food production and consumption are also at the core of the *kurban* sensory-scape, cooking and eating being a way to incorporate, affirm or share local belonging and religious identity. I already mentioned the interconnectedness of *kurban* with the multiple food etiquettes regulating the religious and ritual life, and the more general figure of an “edible chronotope” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). Many accounts insist on a kind of “cultural model” of the *kurban* connected with a whole set of practices, and indicative of a social “way of life” marked by ceremonial and festive interactions through food production and consumption.<sup>20</sup> By narrating (and narrativizing) the ritual, such accounts play a strong role in the cultural qualification of *kurban* as “typical” of the Balkans, to be acknowledged as well as deconstructed (Givre 2006). The classical reciprocity between “Muslim” meat (for the *Kurban Bajram*) and “Christian” eggs (for Easter) is another example of the still persisting importance of the ritual food systems in the expression of religious (and more generally social) interactions.<sup>21</sup> Rather than reaffirming such representations, my purpose here is to underline the way they also engage sensorialities, which are themselves non-fixist but dynamic, for example through assessments concerning the transmission or change of tastes.

Besides the religious dimension of a both sacred and safe food, *kurban* is valued as an expression of a whole cultural and social set of values, challenged by different transformations or upheavals. For instance, *kurban* is sometimes implicitly or explicitly compared to the industrial mainstream food, be it from the communist period or more recently, qualified as fake or adulterated (*mente*). Through assertions like “it’s not a manufactory food”, “you know where it comes from” and even its personification (“it is *baba X*’s” or “family *Y*’s” *kurban*), it materializes a moral economy of trust *versus* distrust but also reciprocity *versus* inequalities (Tocheva 2015), prevalent from the “transition” period to nowadays. At the crossroad of localness (animals, products), personalization (from ritual commitment to technical skills), religious legitimization and social recognition, the “authenticity” of *kurban* is related to different sensory characteristics, making it particularly edible and tasty (*vkusno*). As *rakiâ*, whose quality and value depend on its homemade (*domašna*) or artificial (*izkustvena*, i. e. “industrial”) provenance, *kurban* provides a metaphor for a complex set of re-

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<sup>20</sup> For an evocation of the *kurban* in the Renaissance (*Vâzražđane*) Bulgaria, see for example Gavrilova (1999).

<sup>21</sup> For example, the *kurban* performed by the municipality of Kârcali (2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2015) both for the health (*zdrave*) of the citizens and the inauguration of a new residential neighbourhood was institutionally devoted to the promotion of interreligious coexistence.



A skilful job (Kârcali, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – Olivier Givre).

lations between autonomy and heteronomy, trust and mistrust, translated unto sensory *and* moral criteria (tasty, safe, sacred, but also nutritive, reliable, etc.).

Indeed, the sensory field does not only help at understanding the place of the ritual in social life, but also reveals its transformations and even the conflictual visions about it. During the already mentioned St George *kurban* in Kârcali, the answer to my question about the obvious absence of young people was explicitly sensorial: “they don’t like the taste of the lamb meat”. I already heard considerations about the *kurban* as “too strong” or “too fatty”, especially from young people reluctantly affirming their rejection of a meal – and a ritual – that they only tolerated to suit their parents. The underlying assumption of this remark was also that the youngsters dislike a kind of food associated with older generations and ways of living despised for their “rural” and traditional anchorage. In short, “they don’t want to eat *kurban*” means that “they don’t care about the *kurban*”. Another point is the perception of a ritual – and a meal – devoted to specific welfare goals, for example helping old (*vâzrastni*), retired (*pensionari*) or poor (*bedni*) people (and in some cases marginalized minorities) through food supply, i.e. a socially stigmatizing practice eventually associated with a specific kind of food: soup (*čorba*). It was also indicial of several criticisms heard (mainly from young people) about the “backward” and “shocking” character of the ritual due to the direct experience of animal killing, in a global context marked by new concerns toward animal sensibility (including a cultural distancing from “village-like” habits).



Waiting for the *kurban* (Kârcali, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – Olivier Givre).

One could connect these judgements on taste and distaste to different intuitions about the cultural, social and generational gaps and even conflicts observable but sometimes loosely identifiable concerning the *kurban*. Remarks heard on the field on a “cherished tradition because it allows families and neighbours to gather”, or on the contrary a “barbaric tradition we should be ashamed of”, reveal at once different positions but also different sensibilities, always situated and sometimes reversible, warning us against clear-cut and decontextualized distinctions. Indeed, the first sentence was heard in the (partly Uniate) village of Kuklen in the Plovdiv region in 2000, from a young woman having migrated to western Europe, and telling how she associated *kurban* with the return to Bulgaria during the summer, and its festive and emotional dimensions. The second one was told by the mayor of a village located near Samokov in 1995, a fifty-years-old man apologizing for presenting such an image to French peoples, in the specific context of a *kurban* without religious blessing because of a conflict with the pope, and closer to a local fair with itinerant merchants, saturated *narodna muzika* and smoky *kebabčeta*, in a muddy field ploughed by cars. These two examples tell a lot about the *perception* of tradition according to statuses and positions: on the one hand, a young migrant reenchanting the “taste of home” (Petridou 2004), on the other hand a man with an official charge), and the role of the dialectic between self-presentation and self-knowledge (Herzfeld 1987) in such “sensitive” statements on the ritual. These plural perceptions of *kurban* should also be associated with the changing social context but also sensoryscape of post-socialist (and “post post-socialist”) Bulgaria.

The 2010 *kurban* for the *praznik* (feast) of Sveta Marina in the village of Fazanovo (Strandža region) is indicative of the revelatory qualities of ambiances and senses for the understanding of social local (and global) transformations. Associated to a church constructed between 1997 and 2001 with the financial support of new villagers, this *kurban* was promoted by a businessman from Sofia, established during the 1980s, stating that “a village church needs a *kurban*: we created a celebration and asked villagers with private *kurbani* to participate”<sup>22</sup>. A conscious invented tradition “out of nothing” guided by the vision of a village “without particularities” before, but suitable to a certain way of life (quietness, leisure, panorama, proximity to the Black Sea, etc.). Materialized by comfortable and modern villas (by opposition to rudimentary and often ruined rural houses), the village aesthetic of these neo-villagers was at once duly celebrated and pointed as irreducibly allochthonous by the mayoress’s discourse<sup>23</sup>. In fact, no “real” *kurban* was organized due to the lack of implication of villagers able to perform such ritual: selection of animals, slaughtering, butchering, cooking, etc. Closer to a garden-party under fancy tents, the *kurban* turned to a barbecue with sausages, fried potatoes and salads, gathering friends around gin-tonics. Even the specific dress-code of the organizers (marine pullover and red neckerchief) distinguished them from the local villagers. I attended nonetheless a private *kurban* on the same day, performed by an “old” family of the village: a lamb *gûveč* (stew) baked in the oven with potatoes and different spices (*podpravki*). If no specific mention was made about the collective meal taking place at the same time in front of the house, it was obvious that the private homemade *kurban* was privileged by this family.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The choice to devote a church to *sveta* Marina (18<sup>th</sup> of July) was also dictated by extrareligious reasons: “it is the ideal moment for the people to come back to the village for holidays, especially our residents from Sofia or abroad”.

<sup>23</sup> “We express our thanks to our friends from Sofia and elsewhere, for their giving of this beautiful tradition. We welcome everybody to our traditional celebration after the nine years of the Fazanovo church, which embellish our place, thanks to our friends installed here. Thanks to the sponsors and donors who allowed the organization of this *praznik*. Thanks to all the peoples from Sofia, Burgas, Sliven, Iambol who settled in our village, building beautiful villas, with beautiful facades, green gardens, making our village today far more pretty than it was.” For an analysis of the aesthetic of villas in contemporary Romania, see Vintilă Mihailescu (2014), “Something nice”. Pride Houses, Post-peasant Society and the Quest for Authenticity. *Cultura* 11, 2, p. 83–107.

<sup>24</sup> It was also an occasion for evoking the history of the village, a former *čiflik* (rural property) inhabited by Bulgarian populations displaced from Turkish Thrace after the Balkan wars, by contrast with the “neovillage” discourse, presenting the place as “without history”.

This kind of negotiation of the contemporary village making through ritual involves at once social and sensory distinctions, revelatory of complex economic and cultural relationships. Making *kurban* implies a relational ecology requiring skills and experiences, from technical performances to organizational choices (for example collecting money and deciding the date), individual and collective commitment and desire (*merak*), associated with states of the body-mind, but also tastes and senses related to social values. In my fieldworks, a significant part of the active protagonists of post-socialist *kurban* were in fact retired people (*pensionari*) getting back to the village after a career in the city, reenacting and reembodying a rural *habitus*, *praxis* and *hexis* through their commitment in the ritual. Moreover, the frequent processes of *kurban* revitalization during the post-socialist period as a mode of village sociability and local inscription<sup>25</sup> actualized plural and sometimes conflicting stakes of the “transition” period. For example, the increasing visibility of different *sponsori* in the funding of local *kurban* revealed the social, economic and even political division lines of the neoliberal Bulgarian society, in coexistence but also in contrast with the forms of reciprocity and solidarity<sup>26</sup> often claimed as a moral basis of the ritual. The example of Fazanovo argues for a sensory approach of these dimensions, through ambiances, aesthetics as well as gustative or even clothing qualities<sup>27</sup>, revealing the contrasted perceptions of the *kurban* as local value, emblem and heritage, and the different fates of the “new old *kurban*” (Hristov, Manova 2007).

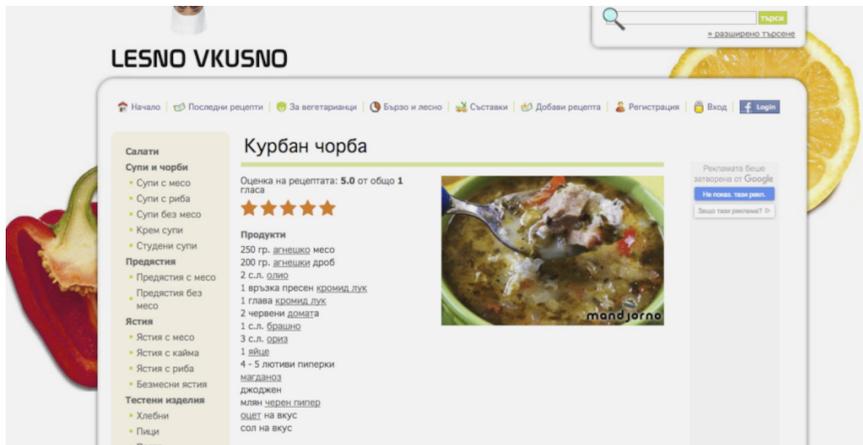
### *Circulation of kurban and flows of perceptions*

It is worthy of attention that mentions of the taste of the *kurban* are also to be found in new versions of the meal, for example in cooking recipes available on the flourishing internet sites devoted to cuisine and gastronomy in Bulgaria. Either proposed by amateur or by professional cooks, these recipes are referred to the traditional Bulgarian cuisine, along arguments like “no other dish

<sup>25</sup> Petko Hristov, Tsvetana Manova (2007), The new “old” Kurban. A Case Study. In: Biljana Sikimic, Petko Hristov (dir.), *Kurban in the Balkans*. Belgrade, Institut des Etudes Balkaniques, p. 209–230.

<sup>26</sup> Detelina Tocheva (2015), “Kurban: Shifting Economy and the Transformations of a Ritual”, in Chris Hann (ed.). *Economy and Ritual: Studies of Postsocialist Transformations*, Berghahn Books, pp. 107–136.

<sup>27</sup> A comparable analysis should be possible with the upheavals endured by the ritual during the socialist period, when it was often recomposed and manipulated, notably by disconnecting it from its religious dimensions (Petar Petrov (1997), “Sâborât v Raduil. Za sotzialisticheskata transformatzija na edin religiozen praznik“. *Bâlgarski folklor* 3–4, Sofia, BAN).



Internet sites presenting *kurban čorba*.

warms the soul of a Bulgarian like the *kurban čorba*” or “it is also good for the health, chance and prosperity of the family” (even if some comments disqualify the sophistication of these modernized – and secularized – reinventions of the *kurban*)<sup>28</sup>. Most of its culinary declinations emphasize the familial and home-made character of the *kurban*, for example through the authenticating figure of the *baba* (grandmother). In these versions, the sensory dimensions of the *kurban* are at once valued and loosely defined: they mostly evoke a “taste of home” (Petridou 2004) tainted with cultural pride and sometimes nostalgia. More explicit “gastronomizations” of the ritual meal combine cultural heritage and culinary professionalization. For instance, during the festival “the taste of Plovdiv” 2019, the mediatic Bulgarian cook Ivan Zvezdev prepared a lamb *kurban* soup, explaining that “this is a traditional recipe for the region, very demanded and with an extraordinary taste. It’s better because of the spices and with more meat. The best lamb soup”<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> A plenty of more or less “domestic” or “professionalized” *kurbani* recipes also exist in Turkish internet cooking sites, proposing “revisited” *kurban* meals by trendy cooks and following all the rules of a visual aestheticization of “fashion” food (on cooking performances as consumption imaginary in the context of the Greek crisis, see also Seremetakis 2019).

<sup>29</sup> <https://podtepeto.com/aktualno/вкусът-на-пловдив-започна-с-пазарджиш/>. It is also noticeable that, despite its non-ritual character, this meal for 250 peoples was distributed “for the health (*zdrave*) of the participants”, as it is commonly done for the *kurban*.

The (semi)professionalization of *kurban* is not necessarily new, considering the usual presence of *kurban čorba* in restaurant menus, but also the fact that some ritual *kurbandžii* are themselves appointed cooks, sometimes remunerated. But the conversion of *kurban* into fixed and written cooking recipes and culinary advises surely acts as a commodification of often implicit culinary know-how. This commodification is also patent in trends like buying meat at the shop or the supermarket for the *kurban* celebration<sup>30</sup>. Such insertion in the market economy doesn't simply suggest a standardization of ritual food, but a transformative coadaptation of the ritual frames with the social and economic forms of consumption, one could encapsulate in dialectical movements (past food *versus* fast food, reauthentication *versus* desacrificialization). In short, and similarly to the already mentioned oscillation between a cherished “heritage” and a despised “backwardness”, contemporary *kurban* can be either valued as “authentic” or “fashionable”, for the same reasons of its entanglement into traditionality or locality. In all cases, the context and environment shape the sensoriscape as well as the cultural imagination of *kurban*. This *kurban* sensorium intricates senses (tastes, smells, ambiances, sounds, etc.) with a set of places, practices, knowledges, skills, recipes, etc. transmitted, recreated, transformed, abandoned, remembered or forgotten (Sutton, 2001).

It is worthy stressing the memory dimension of this sensorium: sensoriality is elaborated along memory frames and plays a core role in the individual as well as the social memories (for the example of taste, Sutton 2001). These combinations between senses and memories are as plural and complex as may be the perceptions and inclinations, (self)presentations and (self)knowledges (Herzfeld 1987), themselves indissociable from the contexts of experience and remembrance. A good illustration is provided by Orhan Pamuk's ironic comments about his child memories of *Kurban Bajram* in Istanbul, revelatory of the familial ambiguities towards religious conformism. Sensory souvenirs of the “hideous, idiot and stinking animal” or the “bad smell” of fresh meat made sensible the duplicity over a moral and familial obligation<sup>31</sup> and the negotiation with ritual liceity, for example by eating butcher's meat instead of the *kurban* meat (reserved to the poor), or drinking alcohol<sup>32</sup>. Thus, sensory elements act as pow-

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<sup>30</sup> For the Turkish case, see Givre (2017a).

<sup>31</sup> “As every good Muslim, every year we would bring a sheep that we would tie up in the inner courtyard of the Pamuk building, and in the morning of the Feast, the local butcher would come and sacrifice it” (Pamuk 2007: 226).

<sup>32</sup> “On the one hand, the meat would be distributed to the poor. On the other hand, the whole family would gather for lunch, sip beer (though prohibited by religion) and eat a completely different type of meat directly bought at the butcher's (on the pretext that fresh meat would smell bad)” (ibid).

erful knots of both moral and aesthetic dispositions, linking tastes or distastes to gust or disgust, but also acceptance or rejection, consent or dissent. In short, senses and values shape one another.

In another context, the gap between memory, imagination, representation, perception and experience is well illustrated by Hammoudi's evocation of the Muslim sacrifice during the Mecca pilgrimage, expressing the striking contrast between his own memories of the family sacrifice in Morocco and the industrial and administrative dimensions of the slaughtering in this context. Widely represented in popular Islamic art, the iconic vision of the patriarch sacrificing a sheep instead of his son, on the summit of a desert hill, becomes an imaginary model, opposed to the vision of millions of animals enclosed in camps awaiting *en masse* slaughtering. This harrowing vision shocked and shook Hammoudi's perception of the sacrifice as an intimate and solemn act (2005: 235), but also revealed him the global transformations of the ritual and questioned his personal relationships to Muslimhood. In short, the confrontation (and even conflict) of *sensoria* contributes to the elaboration of interpretive affordances, for example here the place of neoliberal production, consumption and marketing in the contemporary transformations of Muslim sacrifice (for the case of *Kurban Bajram* in Istanbul, see Givre 2016). Correlatively, one may address the possible impact of new *sensibilities* (for example increasing concerns towards animal suffering and killing) and even the role of *a priori* non-sensory processes (juridical and legal promotion of animal well-being, sophistication of sanitary regulations) on the *sensorial* perception of ritual practices like *kurban*.

On this issue, an astonishing and revelatory declination is the frequent accusation of *kurban* "smuggling" between Bulgaria and Turkey on the occasion of the *Kurban Bajram*. For several years, Bulgarian medias reported cases of "Bulgarian Turk emigrants" arrested at the main Turkish-Bulgarian border checkpoint of Kapetan Andreevo-Kapikule, with forbidden quantities of *kurban* meat. In 2012, "Eight tons of meat, carried in bags or cases, have been confiscated in one day at the Turkish custom of Kapikule. The meat was transported by emigrants, coming back from Bulgaria to Turkey, after the *Kurban Bajram* holidays. (...) Emigrants carried *kurban* meat, more expensive in Turkey than in Bulgaria. This is the reason why the border controls have been reinforced during the days of the Muslim feast." According to the border authorities interviewed in a media report, in 2011 "30 tons of meat have been confiscated. Some people use *Kurban Bajram* for smuggling: they try to introduce in the country meat without certification, from indetermined origin, which is a threat to health. Some assure that they are butchers (*kasapi*) and went to Bulgaria and Macedonia for slaughtering animals, because meat is cheaper. But the authorized quantity for meat importation is limited to 5 kg for every traveller, it's a constant rule,

not only for the *Kurban Bajram*. Moreover, it is mandatory to pack the meat according to our sanitary standards”.

Interestingly, the same report states that “the tradition of *Kurban Bajram* is to slaughter animals, offered as a sacrifice for health (*zdrave*) or good fortune (*bereket*). Traditionally, Bulgarian emigrants go massively to Bulgaria, for slaughtering *kurban* and bring the meat back in Turkey. Since several years however, Turkey has imposed a five kilograms limitation”<sup>33</sup>. What was once a crossborder “tradition” illustrating the migration networks through the circulation of ritual products but also practices and imaginations, came to be an infraction in front of sanitary and economic regulations. Independently from the legal issues and real motivations of the travellers, this case illustrates the forms and the stakes of the circulation (and maintenance) of *kurban* as a mix of religious and economic motivations, attachment to localness and community belonging, confronted to political and juridical borders. On the same way that the social representations but also the intimate perceptions of Muslim sacrifice change in migration and postmigration context (see Brisebarre 1998), one could explore here the effects of movement and border regimes on the moral but also intimate and sensory economies of *kurban*, and the kind of specific “taste of home” (Petridou 2004) they reveal, in face of issues such as migration control or juridical “europeanization”. All these elements plead for a deeper acknowledgement of the relevance of sensory insights in an anthropology of social change through ritual transformations<sup>34</sup>, along with the preceding remarks on the sensory inflexions of *kurban* in post-socialist (and now “europeanized”) Bulgaria.

### **Conclusion: making sense and living senses.**

The starting point of this article originates in a personal and professional interest for the sensory approaches in anthropology, as a powerful renewal of different methodological and theoretical issues, as well as the assumption that in the Balkan studies, these approaches remain undervalued and underexplored. Through a sensory rereading of my own fieldwork experience, my point is to apprehend the cultural practices and moral statements usually associated with the *kurban* in terms of sensorialities and perceptions, as thick, complex and polymorphous

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<sup>33</sup> <http://bnr.bg/Audio.aspx?lang=1026#http://bnr.bg/sites/horizont/Society/World/Pages/1029tur.aspx>, my translation.

<sup>34</sup> Even focuses on the ritual transformations still concentrate on the social and symbolic levels (Langer for the Alevi *kurban* in Turkey, 2008; Sikimic and Hristov on *kurban* in the Balkans, 2007) and downplay the perceptual and sensorial experience of these transformations.

as are the discursive or emotional expressions. These sensorialities are not limited to senses *stricto sensu*, but may include all the perceptions and intuitions involved in one's own experience, themselves not fixed in a monolithic representation but contextualized. In short, social dynamics imply sensory transformations, themselves indicative of statuses and situations, continuities and ruptures, self-presentation and self-knowledge (Herzfeld, 1987). I thus argue that the ethnography of rituals such as *kurban*, but also ritual performance in general<sup>35</sup>, may be strongly enriched by sensory approaches, in terms of a wider and deeper attention to the perceptions (and not only emotions or representations) involved in and generated by them. The relative lack of sensory dimensions in ethnographic accounts of the ritual<sup>36</sup> illustrates not only the main tendency to dissociate *perception* from *meaning*, but the complex theoretical and methodological issues raised by sensory ethnography and anthropology.

Even anthropological endeavours to address sensibility and sensoriality tend to reduce senses and perceptions to emotions, affects and feelings. For example, by prioritizing emotions over perceptions, anthropologies of intimacy apprehend the subject as a body experiencing or expressing affects, but dismiss its corporal thickness as an organism continuously embedded in sensory experiences. As I tried to show from my own experience, it depends on what one *pays attention* to: theoretical frames as well as methodological orientations produce sensory regimes and ethnographic affordances. For instance, it is probably not enough to ask formally and verbally about sensory insights, i. e. to translate senses into discourses. Sensory approaches require the exploration of potentially radically different ways of experiencing fieldwork, not excluding verbal (and other kinds of) communication, but exceeding from afar the limits of explicit knowledge. In this sense, sensory approaches make a step beyond anthropology of emotions or affects, overdetermined by a moral and cultural conception of senses and perceptions. Rather than disqualifying the status of emotions and affects in anthropology (notably in its fruitful exploration of the connections between politics and

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<sup>35</sup> The role of the *sensorium* extends far beyond this specific ritual performance, to only mention the place of the senses in popular orthodoxy (touching and seeing icons for example, Séraïdari 2005), the supernatural (evil or saint) role of sight and vision in the construction and performance of religious reputation (Dubisch 1995, Vältchinova 2002), the auditive dimension of religiosity (choirs, liturgy), or the olfactive nature of holiness (Albert 1990).

<sup>36</sup> For example, in a collective book on the *kurban* in the Balkans, one barely finds three mentions to the taste of the *kurban* and a short evocation of its gustative qualities (Kovalcsik 2007: 125–126). It contrasts with their richness in the classical literature on sacrifice, especially concerning Greek sacrifice, where smell and taste plays an important role, the first being reserved to the Gods under the shape of the smoke of the grilled meat (fat playing a core role), the second being attributed to the humans (in its materiality at once valued and indicative of the human condition of flesh beings).

intimacy), I argue that it would be enriched by a true perceptive and sensory approach, whose goal would not only be to *talk about* embodiment but to *embody*, to *analyse* but to *experiment*.

Sensory anthropology implies a different way to qualify what we actually do and learn in the fieldwork: not only reading “texts” (as suggested by the interpretive and literary turns) but feeling “textures” (and tastes, smells, sounds, etc.), not only sharing meanings but ways of perceiving and sensing, not only being engaged as a subject but as a body, not only understanding but experiencing. One classical obstacle would be to separate or oppose what is complementary and plural: sense (meaning) and senses (perceptions), and to accentuate the often conflictual binarism between a “sensory turn” operating in the restricted area of cognition (purely conditioned by bodily perceptions and psychological dispositions), and social criticism as a capacity to abstract oneself from the *given for granted* (even if intellectually claiming involvement and commitment)<sup>37</sup>. On the contrary, by claiming that “sensory perception is a cultural as well as a physical act” (Herzfeld 2007: 431), one of the stakes of sensory approaches is to connect the *sensorium* to the *socium* under the aegis of experience, as a form of life (and process of living) which never dis-locate the different dimensions of subjectivity, while acknowledging their plural, contradictory and even conflicting features. Being a subject is a perpetual attuning and adjustment of organicity, perceptivity, consciousness, awareness, sensitivity, responsiveness, interactivity and communicability.

Nonetheless, sensory approaches raise important and difficult issues. One is the still prevalent division between different senses *versus* the constant interconnectedness of sensory dimensions and their coalescence in ambiances, environments, movements, scapes, not to mention different kinds of synaesthesia which open to the plurality of our ways of sensing<sup>38</sup>. A fully multisensory ethnography cannot be separated from an ecological anthropology, potentially taking into account an infinite series of interrelated conditions, from our own body-mind dispositions to meteorological impressions (cold or warm, windy or quiet, etc.). Secondly, the already mentioned connection between senses and memory ex-

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<sup>37</sup> In other terms, one should avoid here the too easy (and mutual) accusations of being too much *into-the-world* or *out-of-the-world*.

<sup>38</sup> Synesthesia goes far beyond the common associations between senses (for example sight and hearing, or taste and smell): it may include singular perceptive dispositions (for example associating numbers with colors, or perfume with sounds) and culturally elaborated *sensorium* (for example the association of olfaction with breath as a full sense in the meditative traditions of India, such as yoga, see Howes 2013). Furthermore, synesthesia reveals the cognitive dimension of sensing, i. e. the inextricability of sensing and thinking, for example “it would seem that breathing is the sense of reflection in India as sight is the sense of reflection in the West” (ibid).

tends considerably and blurs the boundaries of experience, time and space. Sensory anthropology implies to overpass the implicit vision of senses and perceptions as “immediate” facts, events, effects, a pure “here and now”, and to take into account the complex interconnections between body memory, mental construction, aesthetic impression, environmental affordances but also duration and spatiality. This is the case for sensory insights that reveal sometimes a long time “after” the experience, or even “before” the experience, under the shape of still “non-lived” but already imagined feelings and perceptions. Thirdly, the process of sensory elicitation faces several obvious difficulties, concerning the ways of qualifying and communicating perceptions, for example their written description in the frame of an article, challenging the “speakability” of perceptions and experiences. All these issues address a genuine but challenging question to every research process (including fieldwork experience, descriptive endeavour, interpretive process for the case of anthropology): where to start and where to end?

Sensory approaches finally engage a conception of anthropology and ethnography not only as experience but experiment, which challenges different demarcating lines. The first is of course the (at once naturalist and culturalist) vision of social reality as a “given” state not to be disturbed or influenced, but observed and analyzed, by different mechanisms of “othering”.<sup>39</sup> Through methods engaging and proposing shared forms of sensoriality, and by really acknowledging that “sensory perception is a cultural as well as a physical act” (Herzfeld 2007: 431), sensory anthropology and ethnography admit that there are no clearly established boundaries between subjects, bodies and environments. Here again, it enables an ecological perspective into which the fieldwork becomes a never-ending process of experience and inquiry, but also creative relationality. It is not by chance that sensory approaches often relate with concerns about ecology and non-humans, ambiance and environments, but also art and creation, performance and enactment, aesthetics and synaesthesia, cognitive pluralism<sup>40</sup> and design thinking. All converge in a deeper perception of research as creation, fostering a sense of experimentation which is also a possible response to the sometimes too normative and reproductive visions of scientific activity. In this perspective, one of the messages conveyed by sensory approaches is that to change representations, we need to change perceptions.

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<sup>39</sup> I include myself in this critic: by distinguishing my own perceptions of the *kurban* from the *kurban sensorium*, I still tend to culturalize the other(s)’ sensations. This sensory “othering” (to enlarge Fabian’s terminology to dimensions he himself neglected), i. e. the distinction between sensory selves and others, has still to be explored.

<sup>40</sup> For instance the various impacts of the technologization of perception, or issues concerning disability, availability, affordance, etc.

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