

DEPART IN PEACE
TWO CASES OF CONTEMPORARY FUNERAL CEREMONIES
IN WESTERN SLOVAKIA

Between 2001 and 2008 I was engaged in researching funeral ceremonies in the village of Závod.¹ I have been regularly revisiting this locality since the late 1980s, and so I was able to support my research of contemporary burial ceremonies with previously acquired knowledge, for example, of the social structure in the village and its social networks. This naturally made things easier for me when exploring a new theme. I was interested in the course of the ceremony, changes in the organisation of funerals, and the behaviour and actions of actors in the ritual. These could be ascertained either by direct observation in the field or on the basis of respondents' testimonies, as well as written and pictorial documentation.² I concentrated on recording changes in short-term intervals during the seven years while I was researching, and also during longer time periods of two or three decades on the basis of reconstruction of the ritual. I followed changes in funeral ceremonies, under the influence of political, economic, social and other conditions on the macrosocial and microsocial levels, paying particular attention to the period of transformation after 1989. My first results were summarised in a more extensive study.³

In this essay, which I consider as a supplement to my 2003 study, I wish to present detailed empirical material from my research. It involves descriptions of two funerals at which I was present in 2003 and 2004. Scientific studies generally do not have enough space to provide, for example, a detailed description of the funeral from beginning to end. This is sometimes to the detriment of knowledge, because full empirical data can serve as comparative material for other researchers.

¹ The village of Závod is located 45 kilometres north-west of Bratislava in the Záhorie region, not far from the Slovak-Austrian border, which follows the Morava River. In 2003 the village had 2600 inhabitants. During the second half of the 20th century there was a growth in population, followed by a moderate decline or stagnation in the closing years of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st. (*Vlastivedný slovník obcí na Slovensku* 1978. 339-40.; *Vrablec* 2000. 65-66; *Kronika obce Závod* 297-208.). The local population was and is almost entirely of Roman Catholic. Some people from the village became prominent personalities in the Roman Catholic Church, which even in the time of socialism played an important role in the locality. *Vrablec* 2000. 31-35., 65-66.

² I carried out research focused on funeral ceremonies in the Závod locality in 2001 (1 day), 2003 (9 days), 2004 (9 days), 2007 (3 days), 2008 (5 days). I was able to observe directly two funeral ceremonies in the locality (2003, 2004) and to conduct interviews with c. 40 informants, these being repeated interviews in the case of roughly 15 of the respondents. The research was further enabled to draw on numerous pictorial documents, since the respondents normally possessed photographs of the funerals in the periods studied, namely from the 1970s to the present.

³ Kiliánová 2003.

By the funeral ritual I understand an ensemble of the special behaviour of social actors and recurring activities, which are linked with the death of a human being. Also how the actions and behaviour of the social actors are normally based on the one hand on (socially disseminated or individually acquired) knowledge, and on the other hand on the faith and world view of the deceased and/or the survivors. The human being's decease and many of the immediate offices done after death are considered in modern European society as an intimate, private affair, which for the most part runs its course with excluding the public.⁴ Only the nearest relatives or invited persons have access to the private space where the deceased is laid. In the locality of my research it might be a female neighbour, for instance, who prepares the deceased for the coffin. However, the subsequent parts of the funeral ceremony, namely the burial and the ceremonial religious or civil parting from the deceased, create a bridge between the private and public space. It was precisely that part of the funeral which is conducted in the public space that was the object of my observation. I did not penetrate the private space, nor have I attempted to do so hitherto. However, as I shall show later, shortly before the beginning of my research one part of the funeral ceremony passed over from the private to the public space and thus became accessible for me.

A ceremony performed in public "transmits" various kinds of information on the actors of the ritual and the local culture, as Edmund Leach stated on the basis of his researches, succinctly designating ritual as a "*message-making activity*".⁵

The manner in which the survivors organise the funeral can provide information on the relations between the deceased and his family members, on the social status of the deceased and his family, on his relations with the other inhabitants and to other social groups, and so on. Since the funeral is in substance a social activity (even if of a special kind), just like other activities it reflects the social relationships and the social status of those participating. In my descriptions I give attention to the behaviour of the funeral actors, which I follow in the context of the social relationships and social hierarchy in the village. The second line of my enquiry is directed towards changes in the ceremony, evoked by various causes.

In the first part of my paper I present material from research conducted in 2003 and 2004, giving readers a detailed description of the funerals of an older and a younger woman. Descriptions of the selected examples are compiled from records in my research diary, interviews with respondents after the funeral and photo-documentation. The descriptions are followed by a discussion, where I analyse the funeral as a social activity and the changes in the ceremony in the context of local culture. I will track the "common" or "uncommon" approaches during the ritual. This means that I will concentrate on accordance with or deviation from the normative performance of the ritual. I ascertained what was normative for a concrete funeral on the basis of the testimonies of respondents, hence from an in-group perspective. Apart from that, I acquired further knowledge of changes in the ritual through observation of funerals over time. During my researches in 2001-2008 I made a reconstruction of funeral ceremonies according to information from respondents and on the

⁴ Ariès 1977.

⁵ Cited according to Parkin 2001. 13368; cf. Leach 1976.

basis of records in the local press and photo-documentation going back to the 1970s. Both of the funerals which I will analyse can therefore be set in a perspective of three decades. Unless otherwise stated, the data in my text come from my fieldwork. In conclusion, I summarise the examples described and the results of my research.

FUNERAL OF HELENA V. IN 2003⁶

On Monday, the first day of my research, I went through the village at 09.00 with Anna G. I was going to the municipal office and Anna G. to the post office, which is located in the same building. Anna G. was one of my long-term respondents. She had lived all her life in Závod, knew most of the inhabitants and often arranged meetings for me with other respondents. Formerly a factory worker, she was a 74-year-old pensioner at the time of my research. But she had in no way slackened in the various activities for which she was well-known in the village. She often baked for weddings or other family occasions, and apart from that she was involved in various activities of the local Roman Catholic parish. She took part in pilgrimages and was always to be seen at church ceremonies and at various village public events.

On the way Anna G. informed me that Alžbeta V's mother must have died, because she had seen Alžbeta V. that morning talking to the sexton and she was dressed entirely in black. When we were returning home from the municipal office, we heard the bell toll the death knell. The pealing was twice interrupted. Anna G. asked, "*How many times did they break off?*" and explained to me that it was a woman who had died. A man would have three-times-interrupted pealing on St. Michael's bell, the most powerful. St. John's bell, the middle one, would be rung twice for a woman. For a child the smallest bell, St. Barbara's, was used. We met the sexton as we were passing by the church. She told us that it was Helena V. who had died, hence not Alžbeta V's mother but her mother-in-law. Just then another woman stopped to talk. She ascertained who the dead person was and a conversation ensued about how Helena V. had died. The women mentioned that Helena V. had been in church the previous Saturday and had come on Sunday also. She had died suddenly at the age of 75. In the afternoon the deceased woman's daughter-in-law Alžbeta V. came to Anna G.'s home. She said that she wanted to have baking done for the wake and ordered 120 cream doughnuts of baked dough, 4 cream rolls and 4 jam rolls. On the same day an official of the municipal office read the death notice for the first time on local radio at 15.00. First there was solemn music, followed by the notice: "*The grieving family V. announces that the funeral of Helena V. will be on Wednesday [...] (date and month omitted – GK) 2003 at the local cemetery. The funeral ceremonies will begin at 14.30. Prayers for the dead will be tomorrow, after evening Mass at the parish church.*" The official read the notice twice. Again it was followed by solemn music.

On Tuesday morning I went to the florist's to photograph the floral decorations ordered for the funeral. The proprietor had already prepared the wreaths, which were mostly of green pine sprigs and artificial flowers. The family had ordered a

⁶ Names used in the study are changed so as to safeguard personal privacy. For the same reason I do not give the full dates of the funerals.

large *pin bouquet* (meaning the flat, circular bouquet generally of real flowers, which is laid on the coffin) of red carnations and white chrysanthemums, supplemented with green trimmings. The colour combination chosen here was that normally and most frequently used at the funeral of an older woman (red combined with green, sometimes also with white). The type of flowers too was traditional. Red carnations and asparagus have long been used in Závod to adorn the deceased in the coffin (see further on in the description). However, the form – *the pin bouquet* – expressed an inclination towards a newer and more expensive floral adornment. Bouquets of this kind, if composed of gerber daisies or carnations, cost 800-900 Sk⁷ upwards. If the surviving relatives order a bouquet of more expensive flowers, for example roses, the price can go as high as 1 500 Sk. Pin bouquets became established in the village during the 1990s. In the older periods (during my research in the 1970s or 1980s) a wreath was laid on the coffin. Gradually it was replaced by the *leaf*, which is a flat-bound bouquet of artificial or live flowers, set most frequently on green pine sprigs. The price of the *leaf* during the time of research began at 200 SK upwards, depending on the flowers chosen. For Helena V.'s funeral the florist had prepared the already-mentioned large pin bouquet of real flowers to be laid on the coffin and two smaller pin bouquets as coffin adornments. One smaller bouquet was of pure white carnations in combination with green, the second was of mixed white and orange carnations. The wreaths and leaf-bouquets were by now of artificial flowers only. According to the proprietor, customers chose artificial flowers because they lasted longer. Likewise, the price of such wreaths and bouquets was lower. However, wreaths and bouquets of real flowers have come to be appreciated more in recent years. The local parish priest also gives preference to real flowers, as I will show later on. From this point of view the flowers at the funeral of Helena V., which the family and close relatives ordered, represented the standard floral decoration, not mean and not over-ostentatious.

During my conversation with the florist local inhabitants were coming into the shop and ordering bouquets for the funeral. For example, a former schoolmate of the deceased chose a bouquet with a violet ribbon, containing four red carnations in combination with little white flowers and greenery. According to the florist, members of the funeral congregation were buying bouquets with 4-6 real or artificial flowers, mostly of red or alternatively orange colour. At 16.00 the death notice was repeated once again on the local radio, in a framing of solemn music. At 17.30 the regular evening services were held in the local Roman Catholic parish church. About 100-120 people attended. I sat on a bench with two acquaintances, with whom I had gone to the church. Roughly from 18.30, i.e. shortly after the ending of evening services, prayers for the deceased began. About 80 people remained in the church. The prayers lasted approximately half an hour. After the prayers the immediate family of the deceased remained outside. The son and daughter-in-law spoke to people and thanked them for coming to pray.

On Wednesday, the day of the funeral, two women cleaned the church at the cemetery, which was used occasionally as a funeral church.⁸ I photographed the

⁷ Slovak crowns; 30 SK = 1 Euro

⁸ This was originally a Gothic parish church, which at the close of the 19th century was replaced by a new and larger church in the centre of the village.

freshly-dug grave. At 11.00 I had just finished conversing with the sexton when one of the women who had done the cleaning arrived and asked the sexton to bring the real flowers to the cemetery. She told her that the parish priest had given instructions to throw out the artificial flowers that were on the altar, so that there would only be real flowers at the funeral.

In the afternoon, about 12.30, the family of the deceased assembled at the cemetery church. The coffin was laid head towards the altar and feet facing the main entrance, which remained locked. The church was entered by the side doors. The deceased in her coffin was covered from chest-level in a white sheet. Her hands were joined and a rosary twined round them. Small red carnations and asparagus were laid on the sheet. On a chair beside the coffin there was a glass of holy water and a sprig of asparagus. Wreaths and bouquets were placed around the coffin. The deceased's daughter-in-law was in the church, still cleaning chairs. I went in along with a neighbour of the deceased. Immediately afterwards another neighbour came, an older woman. She came up to the deceased, touched her hands and burst into tears. She told the daughter-in-law that she'd been talking to her as recently as Sunday. Afterwards she took the sprig, sprinkled the deceased with holy water and blessed herself. The neighbour noticed that I was taking photographs in the church and nodded her head in agreement. Turning away from the coffin she left the church, went to her own family's grave and watered the flowers. Finally she went home on her bicycle, because there was still an hour and a half before the Mass was to start.

Shortly afterwards the deceased woman's son came. He took his stand beside his wife and together they stood by the open coffin. Gradually more people came and they stepped aside from the coffin. The cemetery church, which had a capacity of about 90-100 people, was completely filled before the beginning of Mass. A smaller group of people stood outside in front of the church, although it was a scorching hot day. Most of them carried bouquets of flowers in their hands. Shortly before the beginning of Mass the grave-digger shut the coffin. The son of the deceased, despite an effort at self-control, wept openly at that moment, as did his wife who was standing beside him. The deceased's second, unmarried son and other family members stood nearby.

About 14.30 the Mass and funeral ceremonies for the deceased began. These were performed by the local parish priest, who was assisted not only by servers but also by a second priest. The latter was the deceased's nephew, who had just finished his studies and had been ordained not long previously. The fact that two priests were present at the Mass raised the significance and prestige of the ceremony in the inhabitants' eyes. Indeed, many of the funeral congregation were aware of the fact that the deceased belonged to a prominent farming family in the village. Certainly, during the time of socialism the V. family's property had been incorporated in the local JRD (co-operative), but the knowledge that the V.'s were a *family of substance* was retained in the consciousness of many of the inhabitants. After the Mass ended four men carried the coffin from the church. They were the two sons of the deceased, a grandson and a further relative. A small procession formed. One of the Mass-servers went first with a cross, followed by the priests. The coffin followed next and after it the deceased's daughter-in-law with her daughter and closest family. In the cemetery there is only a little space between the graves, and so it is not possible for a long pro-

cession to walk behind the coffin. The funeral congregation was obliged to approach the open grave from a variety of directions.

Equally, there was little space around the grave. The priests continued with the funeral ceremonies, standing by the rests of the coffin. Behind the gravestone, hence by the head of the coffin, the server stood with his cross and behind him were male and female choir singers. The closest relatives squeezed into the space by the left side of the grave, since on the right-hand side the clay was heaped from the grave-pit and there was another grave immediately alongside. The rest of the congregation surrounded the grave from all sides in a number of rows.

After the ceremonies ended with the final hymn, the men of the family, helped by the grave-digger, lowered the coffin into the pit. The priests first threw some clay into the pit, after them the closest family, and then gradually all the congregation. After the people had thrown clods of clay into the grave, they turned to the family and expressed their sympathies. When the funeral ended the family and invited guests went to the funeral feast, which was held in a local restaurant.

FUNERAL OF EMÍLIA T. IN 2004

During my research in Závod during the following year I learnt from a local radio report of the death of a young woman. On Monday at 16.00 an official of the municipal office made the following announcement. *"The grieving families T. and Ch. announce to their friends and acquaintances that the funeral of the deceased Emilia T. will be held tomorrow [...] (date and month omitted; the official did not mention the year- GK) at 14.30 at the local cemetery. Prayers for the deceased will be today after Holy Mass at 19.30 in the parish church."*

As usual, the announcement was introduced and concluded by solemn music. I soon learnt from respondents that the funeral to be held was of a 24-year-old woman who had died of a serious illness. It is interesting that the announcement was made not only by the family of the husband whom the deceased had married only shortly before, but equally the parents of the deceased. At the funeral the husband and the father of the deceased stood with equal prominence in the forefront during the entire ceremony.

During the morning of Tuesday, the day of the funeral, I photographed the prepared wreaths and bouquets in the florist's. The pin bouquet for the coffin, which the husband had ordered, contained 24 cream and yellow roses, combined with small white flowers. The other prepared bouquets were of red carnations, white lilies, white and cream roses, or kalias. Bright colours predominated. As against that, the majority of the wreaths were of artificial flowers. Emília T.'s schoolmates took a collection for a large *leaf* of real white carnations and cream kalias. I was struck by the rich pin bouquet of eight real cream kalias, combined with small white flowers, which the deceased's brother-in-law (brother of the husband) had got made.

On Tuesday afternoon at approximately 13.40 I came to the cemetery church, where the deceased was laid out in her coffin. The husband and father of the deceased stood by the bier, her mother, probably her father- and mother-in-law and other relatives sat in a pew. A woman of her own age was taking leave of the deceased. She stroked her forehead, wept over her. Afterwards she took a box twig, dipped it in the

holy water and sprinkled the deceased. The deceased lay in a white coffin, abundantly adorned with gold ornaments.

About 14.25 a group of musicians, a wind ensemble, positioned itself by the church doors. The musicians played a single piece. It was probably then that the grave-digger closed the coffin, but I was unable to observe this. Next, to the peal of bells a Mass-server came out with a cross, followed by the closed coffin, the priest and servers. A choral group was standing beside the wind ensemble: two women and one man. The bearers put down the coffin on a stand near the central cross in the cemetery, which is situated about ten metres in front of the side entrance to the church. The coffin was turned feet towards the church. By the head of the coffin the server with the cross, which was bound with a white ribbon, took his position. The priest and other servers stood by the feet, and behind them the musicians and singers. To the right of the priest the husband and father of the deceased stood by the coffin, immediately behind them in a semi-circle the immediate family, and to the left of the coffin the other family members. I estimated that there were 400-500 people in the cemetery. The funeral was held on a working day, so the deceased's former school-mates had to take time off. The funeral congregation had bouquets in their hands. If there was a couple together, only the woman had flowers. However, some of the men, although they came alone, did not bring flowers. Many of the congregation were unable even to get into the cemetery: they stood before the main gate. The area in front of the cemetery was completely filled with parked cars and there were vehicles also in the side streets. The priest began the funeral ceremony and the singers then sang the first hymn, *"The Sorrows of Death Have Encompassed Me"*. In his sermon the priest spoke with high praise of Emilia's fortitude during her illness, and this was followed by the hymn *"The Lord is My Shepherd"*. After the conclusion of the ceremonies in front of the church, the singers sang a farewell to the deceased from her husband, parents, friends and acquaintances. During the farewell hymn most of those present wept.

Afterwards the priest gave a signal and the four men, assisted by the grave-digger, carried the coffin on a wheeled cart to the grave. By the grave the priest prayed once more, music sounded and the singers sang the final hymn, *"Nearer, My God, to Thee"*. To the sound of this hymn the grave-digger and the four men lowered the coffin into the grave. The priest threw clay into the grave, after him the husband came first to the grave, then the family of the deceased and other relatives. The funeral congregation formed a line and threw clay into the grave, gave condolences to the family and laid flowers on the grave. Immediately after the funeral ended there was a Mass for the departed soul. There followed the funeral feast, which was held in a restaurant.

After the funeral I went to buy groceries. The shop assistant commented on the funeral, how there were many people and a great many flowers. She spoke about the illness of the deceased, and she also talked about other funerals, for example a ceremony for a 16-year-old girl, who had died not long before of a similar illness over the course of half a year. Also two days later, in a group interview which was devoted to another theme, the respondents in conversation returned to the funeral of Emilia. One of them said that she felt so sad, she preferred not going to the funeral at all.

DISCUSSION: CHANGES IN THE FUNERAL CEREMONY IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL CEREMONIAL CULTURE

Helena V.'s funeral in many ways followed the conventional local pattern of a ceremony for an older woman. On the day of the funeral the deceased was first laid out for two hours in the cemetery church, so that all relatives and acquaintances could take their leave of her. The laying-out of the deceased in the cemetery church had become the convention since 2000, when it also became customary to lodge the deceased in ice-boxes in Závod.⁹ Previously, while the inhabitants of Závod had carried their deceased to neighbouring villages to be kept in the funeral homes there, the deceased was ordinarily brought home two to three hours before the start of the funeral and laid out at home. The funeral procession afterwards went from home to the cemetery; the coffin was transported in a car and not carried by bearers, as it had still been as late as the 1970s.

Despite the fact that from the late 1970s/early 1980s the dead person was no longer kept at home in the days before the funeral, the inhabitants maintained the custom of prayers for the dead on one or two evenings. Relatives, neighbours and acquaintances assembled for evening prayers at the house of the deceased or at the house of the surviving family members. As a funeral memento the family would distribute holy pictures to those taking part in the prayers. They would also offer open sandwiches, cream pastries, sweet cakes, small flavoured pastry pieces and similar refreshments. To drink they provide alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. In case the person to be buried was one of the well-known and much-liked residents of the villager, as for example the old sexton who died in 1999, those present at the evening prayers would fill as many as four rooms in the house. From 2000, however, the evening prayers were shifted from the house to the church, following the example of surrounding villages where this change had already taken place years before. The innovation was made by one well-off family; although some of the inhabitants commented ironically, *"The N.s can't afford the sandwiches!"* the change took hold. During the period of my research the majority of inhabitants considered evening prayers in the church as a practical and good solution, which eased the strain on the survivors during the days before the funeral. At the funeral of Helena V. no one objected to the fact that the evening prayers were held in the church. By this means almost all parts of the funeral ceremony were transferred from the home to the public domain, which most people also welcomed. Anna G. commented as follows: *"I think now it's better, more modern. At that time the corpse was at home the whole time, you couldn't do anything like that. Now they take the corpse away, there's peace in the house, everyone can get on with things... there's enough to be seen to: the priest has to be called,*

⁹ In the village of Závod the removal of the dead to ice-boxes became generally current at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s. However, the dead persons had to be taken to surrounding villages, because there were no ice-boxes in Závod. In 1999, however, building began in the village of a funeral home, which was projected to include a mortuary room. The funeral home was to be built in the lower part of the graveyard, where previously there had been a wooden morgue. Since the building of the funeral home was protracted, the municipal office bought ice-boxes and provisionally located them in the sacristy of the cemetery church. Hence, from 2000 the dead could be taken to ice-boxes in the immediate village.

singers have to be hired, the doctor has to give his certificate [...] It seems to me that it's better now."¹⁰

As from the year 2000, the home at the time of a person's death was an exclusively private place, to which none but the closest family had access, with others admitted only on invitation. The dead person remained in the house only a short time after death (assuming that he/she died at home), to enable the survivors to prepare the body for the coffin, which was done as before by older women relatives or neighbours. The coffin was then immediately taken away to the ice-boxes in the cemetery church.

Nonetheless the transference of most of the rites to the public domain, in particular the laying-out of the deceased before the funeral ceremonies in the cemetery church, changed the character of one important and in most cases powerfully emotional moment, the covering of the deceased with the coffin lid. At this point of the ceremony, so long as it was conducted at home, only the closest family, the grave-digger and sometimes the local teacher remained by the coffin. The survivors took a brief farewell of the deceased, for example with a versified leave-taking which the teacher composed and read. If the family had not called the teacher, the survivors took their leave of the deceased with some improvised words or simply a kiss, a touch and the like. Afterwards the grave-digger covered the coffin with the lid and nailed it down, which was often one of the hardest moments for the survivors.

In the case of both of the funerals analysed, from 2003 and 2004, the grave-digger closed the coffin in the church before the eyes of the congregation. The survivors were thus denied the opportunity of spending a short while with the deceased persons in private and freely giving vent to their feelings. According to the research findings, dignified behaviour was generally expected from the survivors during the funeral: there should be no loud weeping or wailing or public exclamations over the coffin. Anna G. expressed this in the following words: *"They're more modern. They think it's somehow going too far (to weep—GK). They weep, but everyone tries to do it in a smothered way [...] So each one holds it inside themselves, very quietly. There's no dignity in that."*¹¹

On the other hand, as can be gathered from respondents' testimonies, quiet weeping is tolerated and in certain circumstances, for example where the dead person is young or the circumstances are tragic, it may even be expected. Equally, weeping is tolerated, even expected, at certain emotionally charged moments of the ceremony. Such moments include, apart from the sealing of the coffin, for example the sung leave-taking from the family, relatives and acquaintances.

If we follow the further course of the ceremony in time sequence, we observe that at the funeral of Helena V. the Mass for the departed soul and the church funeral ceremony were conducted together in the cemetery church. One finds this procedure in Závod in a minority of cases and generally it indicates close ties with the Roman Catholic church, also possibly that the family has a significant social status. In Helena V.'s family both conditions applied. The exceptional quality of the ceremony and its divergence from the usual was emphasised also by the presence of not one but two

¹⁰ Research 2001.

¹¹ Research 2001.

priests. Another exceptional funeral in 1998 had been conducted in similar fashion: the deceased was an older woman who had two brothers Roman Catholic priests and also two relatives who were nuns. The survivors organised the funeral so that the deceased was carried in her coffin to the parish church in the centre of the village, where Mass was performed for the departed soul, with the entire procession continuing afterwards to the cemetery. The funeral ceremonies were recited doubly: as previously in the church, once again in the cemetery, because the priest-brothers of the deceased had organised the proceedings in this manner.

In contrast, the second example presented – the funeral of the young woman Emília - from the point of view of the church ceremony represented the usual, most frequent model in Závod. The funeral ceremonies were performed not in church but outside in the cemetery by the central cross and beside the open grave. A single priest, the local priest of the parish, performed the church rites. Only after the coffin had been laid in the grave and the ceremonies concluded was Mass said for the departed soul, in the parish church in the centre of the village. A wind ensemble, which performs when a young person dies, played at Emília's funeral. It is not the custom to order music when the dead persons are older, though even here there may be some exceptions. In 2003 music was played at the funeral of an 83-year-old woman. A former soprano in the local choir performed along with the wind ensemble, because the deceased had expressed such a wish before her death and the survivors had decided to comply with her unusual request.

In my description I noted that Emília's coffin had been white with many golden adornments; there was also a white ribbon bound on the cross which the server had carried before the coffin. White, cream or pink colours also predominated in the floral adornment. In the 1970s and '80s, when a young unmarried girl died young people would carry in front of the coffin two crowns of rosemary decorated with white and pink ribbons, and white ribbons would hang from the coffin. Emília was already married, but she had died young. Hence there was a white ribbon bound to the cross and most of the funeral congregation had chosen floral gifts in bright colours. Likewise there were more real flowers than at the funeral of Helena V. and a large number of the congregation strewed bouquets directly on the grave. As the respondents explained to me, in cases of tragic death the survivors, relatives and acquaintances "*don't spare the pennies*".

If we were to compare the floral gifts and floral adornments at the funerals in 2003 and 2004 for example with the period from the 1980s, we would see a relatively large difference in bulk and variety. The quantity had been growing from the 1990s, when the custom gradually became established in Závod that all members of the congregation would bring flowers to the funeral. This change was the easier to effect because of the supply offered by the new florists' which opened in the village after 1989. The florist began to offer a rich assortment of flowers, transported from a wholesaler's warehouse in Bratislava. From a longer time perspective therefore, the floral adornment at the funerals of both the older and the younger deceased showed a striking increase. This fact is evident to respondents, who have drawn attention to the growing expense in this component of the funeral. Despite this, flowers do not account for a significant part of the overall budget. Unfortunately, I do not have at my disposal any data on the costs for the two funerals described, of Helena V. and Emília

T. However, the break-down of expenses which I acquired from a funeral in 1999 will help to form a certain idea of the financial outgoings and their mutual relation.¹² According to this record, the costliest part of the funeral continued to be hospitality.

CONCLUSION

The focus of my article is on detailed empirical data on the funeral ceremonies of two women from the years 2003 and 2004. I studied the rituals practised at a human being's death as a social activity, hence as a certain peculiar kind of action and behaviour of the participants involved. I have incorporated both of the examples selected in the wider framework of research material on funerals acquired in Závod in 2001–2008, while tracking their accordance with or diverging from the usual performance of the ritual. Divergences from the usual ritual in the cases described resulted from the social position of the dead person and her family or from individual decisions, or they occurred thanks to close family ties with the Roman Catholic Church and its dignitaries.

At the same time I have studied changes in funerals over a period of roughly three decades, given that I had at my disposal a reconstruction of rituals going back to the 1970s. Comparison of funeral ceremonies in time brought a number of interesting findings on changes of a practico-organisational, economic and other nature (for example removal of the dead person to ice-boxes, abolition of the practice of holding prayers and offering refreshments at home), which however had important effects on changes in the ritual (laying out the dead person before the funeral outside of the home; holding evening prayers before the funeral in the church). I consider the most important changes in the contemporary funeral in Závod to be the transference of most parts of the ceremony from the private to the public domain. The change has brought a disturbance of the intimacy of the ceremony and subjected the conduct of the survivors and all actors in the ritual to greater control on the part of local society, or at least the possibility of greater control. While it is a generally accepted thesis that in modern society the human being's death diverges ever more from the public into the private domain, in certain parts of the contemporary funeral ceremony in the village of Závod we can observe the opposite. The empirical data acquired give depth to

¹² Outgoings on the funeral of an old woman in 1999. In Slovak crowns.

Floral adornment: 1 150 (Pin bouquet for the coffin 850, carnations and asparagus for the coffin 240, 5 small bouquets, which the grandsons carried 60)

Funeral: 7 684 (singers 400, servers 100, priest 500, bell-ringing 300, grave-digger 1 100, doctor 100, removal 100, coffin 4.904, holy pictures 180)

Foodstuffs: 9.479 (restaurant bill 6.300, cook 300, eggs 250, purchase of materials for pastries 1 960, wine 184, open sandwiches 485)

Total outgoings: 18,313 Sk

The family organised one prayer evening. According to local custom the survivors distributed holy pictures to those participating in prayers. At the prayer evening the family offered open sandwiches, wine, part of the pastries. The other part of the pastries was used at the funeral feast in the restaurant. Roughly 100 people attended the funeral feast.

In comparison with 1999, one must allow for a rise in prices by 2003. According to information given by respondents, funerals in 2003 cost 20,000 – 24,000 Sk (unfortunately, there are no data giving a more detailed break-down of expenses).

our detailed knowledge of the mutations of cultural phenomena under the influence of macrosocial (modernising, global and transforming) changes. At the same time, however, they show that the concrete form of a cultural phenomenon's mutations is shaped to a great extent by local cultural tradition and the "local time" of the changes.

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