“DO YOU WANT TO BE KRAMPUS?” Santa Claus, globality and locality of Christmas tradition¹

László KÜRTI

Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Miskolc, Miskolc, Hungary; email: bolkurti@uni-miskolc.hu

ABSTRACT:

In this paper the author argues that the Christmas holidays, notwithstanding their international standing as a religious and commercial season, are most productively understood as a *glocal* phenomena, a concept intended to link the local with the global in a dialectics of homogenization and particularism. Juxtaposing data from Hungary and Eastern Europe, the author provides an anthropological analysis that highlights the transformative power Christmas traditions and Santa Claus have played in diverse cultural settings since the late twentieth-century. For even the imposition of communist ideology, conceived as a globalizing force, failed to eradicate images of Santa Claus; both his persona and that of his devilish imp, Krampus, survived such ruthless attempts at indoctrination with only the slightest of modifications. In view of its economic and cultural significance, this paper argues in favor of international recognition of Saint Nicholas day, December 6th as a glocal civil holiday.

Keywords: Christmas, Santa Claus, globalization, local responses, Hungary.

Scholars periodically deploy the linked sites of Santa Claus and Christmas to investigate cultural meanings and their variants (Miller, “Christmas: An anthropological lens” 409–442; Whiteley, *Christmas, ideology and popular culture*). Several historical and anthropological analyses have attempted to anchor these phenomena to globality as instances that integrate historical, social, and economic aspects of late-capitalist cultural experiences (Forbes, *Christmas: A Candid History*; Hauschild, *Weinachstmann. Die Wahre Geschichte*; Miller,

1 A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the conference ‘Saint Nicolas et ses Acolytes – Anthropologie des figures hivernales européennes,’ Université de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, 17 December 2018. I thank the organizers for inviting me, and the participants – especially to Matthäus Rest who offered me invaluable ideas about Krampus-revival –, for exciting discussion. I am grateful to Catherine Portuges for helping me to finalize my original ideas.

Unwrapping Christmas; Nissenbaum, *The battle for Christmas*; Weber-Kellermann, *Das Weihnachtsfest. Eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Weihnachtszeit*; Whiteley, *Christmas, ideology and popular culture*). A unique example attesting to the interfusion of local elements with international trends may be found in Inuit (Eskimo) society in which European Christmas traditions are mixed with tribal winter solstice celebrations. Santa Claus's first appearance in 1930 as a white post-al apprentice masquerading in front of the tribal assembly must indeed have been quite shocking to native members of the community (Laugrand and Oosten, "Quviasukvik, the celebration of an Inuit winter feast in the central Arctic" 212-213). While Inuits retained the practice of their traditional songs, drum dances, games and dog races, by the late 1930s Scottish whaling jigs and reels became a fashionable trend at Christmas balls.

Another remarkable instance is located in Japan, a country of fewer than one percent of Christian followers, where Christmas has become a conspicuous example of "Western cultural imperialism and a major secular and commercial festivity (Kimura and Belk "Christmas in Japan: Globalization Versus Localization" 326). Japanese families and communities concocted Euro-American elements with no consistency as to their original meanings and connections; "real" Santa Clauses are exported from Norway and Finland to create a memorable consumerist holiday. The Japanese consciously selected the familiar character of Santa with full awareness of his status as outsider and foreigner (*gaijin*); yet his side-kick, the devilish Krampus, has not yet enjoyed the privilege of participating in this glocal tradition.

As these examples suggest, the concept of glocal is not a novel invention, a fact I can assert from personal experience. In the early 1990s, when much discussion took place concerning the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing capitalist rebuilding of Eastern Europe, myself and my co-editor accidentally 'invented' the concept of 'glocal.' This is what we wrote in the introduction to our book, *Beyond Borders*: "From the clash of the global and local forces in the post-modern and post-communist setting more particularly, we witness the emergence of the new cultural concept: 'glocal' (Kürti and Langman, "Introduction: searching for identities in the new East-Central Europe" 2). Prior to this sentence, we cited a little known article by the Dutch anthropologist Peter Kloos (1936–2000) on globalization and local violence published in 1993 (Kloos, "Globalization and localized violence"), followed by a citation from an insightful essay by the Haitian-American scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949–2012) on global cultural blending ("Anthropology and the savage plot"). Neither of these fine anthropologists mentions glocal or glocalization as these constructs were not circulating within anthropology at that time. As it was then, we only understood glocal as a breakthrough political transformation sweeping across Eastern Europe with serious consequences for individual and social identities and cultural processes.

Previously, Roland Robertson has described changes that emerged after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of communism as "glocalization," defined as the interpenetration of universalism and particularism ("Glocalization," 25-44). However, that term was first used analytically by the Belgian geographer, Eric. A. Swyngedouw ("The Mammon quest. Glocalisation," 39-67). In further confirmation of the ontology of glocalization, the concept was actually invented in Japan during the late 1980s to indicate benefit to the world market from the utilization of local (Japanese) business opportunities; "global localization" was abbreviated to yield 'glocalization,' or *dochakaku* in Japanese (Tulloch, *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, 134). Its origin notwithstanding, glocal and glocalization could not, I would emphasize, have transpired without the terms global and globalization.² Yet in spite of its longevity in social sciences, globalization as a concept is fraught with contradictions, originally anchored to western capitalist penetration into distant regions of the globe, primarily to counter earlier ethnocentric expressions such as colonialism and imperialism. Since the 1960s, however, globalization has been updated increasingly to mean cultural Americanization. The overwhelming influence of the American media industry is unquestionable in the creation of a mediatized new world culture since the 1980s. But this is only part of the story. As Eric Wolf argues cogently, "we can no longer think of societies as isolated and self-maintaining systems. Nor can we imagine cultures as integrated totalities in which each part contributes to the maintenance of an organized, autonomous, and enduring whole" (*Europe and the people without history*, 390). This view aligns with that of the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz who argues that our one world culture: "is created through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory ("Cosmopolitans and locals in world cultures" 37)."

The emergence of glocal ideas, objects and processes requires two or more combined patterns: a fusion of global and locale networks, home-grown or native traditions together with international influences. Locally the timing and meeting points of these systemic forces may at first be rejected, only to be accepted in incremental phases later on. For we know that few 'novelties' are welcomed immediately as people tend to be reluctant to accept—or, for that matter, often abhor -- foreign goods and ideas. Community values, class, ethnic, religious and gender systems may differently and fundamentally influence the process (Sabbar and Dalvand, "Semiotic approach to globalization" 81-82). As the modus operandi matures value judgment may shift from negative to positive. However, conflict between the new and the customary may produce resistance in certain communities and mistrust between elite cosmopolitans and commoners, often igniting counter-ideologies such

2 For a succinct treatment of glocalization from various perspectives see Victor Roudometof (*Glocalization: A critical introduction*) and Neil Brenner ("Global Cities, Glocal States").

as nativistic revivals, or back-to-the-roots movements. As Arif Dirlik has noted (“The global in the local” 38-39), there is also the danger that localism may be anchored to hegemonic nationalism and romantic nostalgia for past greatness and cultural traditions that imprison the increasingly global present in the past. As I will demonstrate below with reference to Christmas tradition, international processes and cultural transfers are never even, unidirectional and final. Instead privileging globalization as an abstract universal ideology, we may view glocality as “dialectic between the global and the local. Particular contexts still matter even in an epoch of intensifying globalization; the global and the local interpenetrate, rather than necessarily competing in a zero-sum game” (Robert Holton, “Some comments on cosmopolitanism and Europe” 33). Expressions of hybridization, deterritorialization/re-territorialization, indigenization, and even globalization (from growth and globalization) have been with us in the past three decades to deal with the issue at hand here. Without doubt, universalization and particularism describe concrete cross-cultural examples as validation, yet the question arises: are these simply different ways of understanding the multitude of international developments that progress at times in unison yet also independently across states and world regions.

In order to unpack the myriad meanings of global-local interplay of that tradition, I emphasize its three analytical concepts in addition to devout piety: familiar context, gift-economy, and mythic panoplies that play out in truly glocal festival milieus. Founded upon the original celebration of a fourth-century wonderworker Catholic bishop, Saint Nicholas, modern Christmas embodies one of the most fundamental and overarching relationships: a multitude of interaction of children and parents, relatives and neighborhood, lay and religious communities, and eventually the state. However, trying to compare Santa Claus to the deeds of the legendary Saint Nicholas may open up a vast field of anachronistic misunderstandings yet local variations in Christmastide both reinforce and challenge these interactions as for example attested by variedly “wild” and “unruly” Austrian Krampus-revival, an invented tradition that in turn influenced American media industry especially cinema (Rest and Seiser, “The Krampus in Austria”). Strangely but not unexpectedly, that carnivalesque winter solstice holiday, when rambunctious youth, dressed in rags and collecting food while frightened others by creating noise and anarchy, has maintained its image of piety, love and tenderness as mainstays of ecumenical family values. As Gary Cross has argued the modern holiday has been tamed from their unruly origins mainly through a process of domestication, whereby the focus of the event has migrated from Lord of Misrule celebration to evoking and maintaining a sense of wondrous childhood innocence (Cross “Holidays and New Rituals of Innocence” 83-120).

The second, most controversial aspect is gift-giving, a ceremonious offering of presents and its reciprocity, items of social bonding, identity maintenance and social stability (Godelier, *The enigma of the gift*, 5;

Sinardet and Mortelmans, “The feminine side to Santa Claus” 124-126; Schwartz, “The social psychology of the gift” 1-11). Whether small or large, provided by close relatives or friends, the millennial custom of gift-giving is anchored to larger economic cycles of production, distribution, and consumption. Yet it is obvious that global commercialization of Christmas season cannot persist without support of the church, and assistance by multinational conglomerations and the state. However, this is not a modern invention, as in German speaking Central Europe Christmas markets (*Christkindlmarkt*) have been an enduring national tradition; in Vienna for instance it survived for more than seven-hundred years (Lock, “Christkind vs. Santa Claus” 69). Despite condemnation of clergy and conservative leaders, furious holiday spending is not simply beneficial for the economy: it creates overspending and causes consumerist gender anxiety about buying and giving specific fashionable items (Sinardet and Mortelmans “The feminine side to Santa Claus”). For instance, one study of children’s letters to Santa Claus in the United States finds that over half the requests were brand-specific, with nearly 85 percent of the letters mentioning at least one brand name (Otnes, Kyungseung, and Young “All I Want for Christmas” 183-194). There are obviously age and gender differentiations, girls for example tended to have a wider range of brand requests than boys, who seemed to favor popular items.

Another fundamental aspect concerns myths and popular religiosity balancing as they are on the fine line of rationality/irrationality axis. Those accepting scientific views concerning current mythical beings – such as vampires, zombies or Santa Claus – as ridiculous most likely reject the element of the “sacred” or “half-belief” that are so profoundly interwoven in our daily existence (Campbell, “Half-Belief and the Paradox of Ritual Instrumental Activism”). All this leaves us with perhaps one of the most intriguing questions: how has such a concoction of pagan, sacrosanct, and contentious winter holiday been undergoing constant renewal as a global familiar consumerist Christian popular festivity? How were sordid disguised men, who caused havoc and fright among locals, turned into mild and bizarre characters and presently into digital monstrosities? I concur with the statement of Gerd Baumann who has convincingly argued that rituals not only reaffirm nostalgic social bonds and values but “may equally speak to aspirations towards cultural change” (“Ritual implicates ‘Others’” 99). Christmas glocalization entails, first and foremost, selections and choices: ultimately, it is about integrating and challenging local, national and international phenomena.

Growing up in Hungary I remember vividly that we were members of the pioneer movement, a youth organization of political indoctrination existing all over Eastern Europe under communist ideology. One of its mainstays was building a socialist utopia while creating a “happiness culture” (Kürti, “Cold War happiness” 83-84). Socialist education was, no doubt, part of our everyday life but we eagerly awaited the arrival of

December, a month referred to in old Hungarian as “Christmas month” (*karácsony hava*). Actually, December 6 was not an official holiday back then, nor is it considered as such today.³ It has been one of the quint-essential functions of kindergartens and schools to organize the much awaited occasion for children. In those days the state graciously looked away and despite the rather strict communist rule, the population was complicit in celebrating the coming of Santa Claus as a joyous occasion. Yet, there was an important proviso: namely, that we were awaiting not Santa Claus (*Mikulás* in Hungarian) but Father Winter or Grandfather Winter (*Télapó*). So, Father Winter – dressed as usual in his furry red coat, pointed hat, with long beard and mustache, carrying a bishop’s crozier – was welcomed sometimes together with his bedraggled, horned accomplice, the Krampus, carrying a broom or a trident. His frightening looks always quieted us down, as if to give credence to Lévi-Strauss’ reminder that the Christmas holiday “functions according to a double rhythm of heightened solidarity and exaggerated antagonism” (“Father Christmas executed” 47).

Our world was politically parochial, breeding reverence for our state and family, but not fully constricted. The world of that small town from which I still cherish remnants and perspective, seems far away now, but it was our town’s cultural-political landscapes that contributed, as local cultures and communities do, to our ideas and beliefs. Traditions matter, family traditions matter even more and this was not changed dramatically by state socialist Marxist-Leninist doctrine (Mason and Muir “Conjuring up traditions: Atmospheres, eras and family Christmases” 607-629). However, the ideological pressure was there as winter celebration was slightly transformed by communist countries within the orbit of Soviet domination by turning the earlier Austro-German Santa Claus into the Russian Father Winter (*Ded Maroz*) following dictates from Moscow. Within our family sphere the secular Father Winter and his gift-giving provided the sufficient explanation. Thus, the officially organized festive school occasion was made a bit more cozy and family-centered when you put your clean shoes in the window so Santa would place sweets, nuts and apples (and only those items). Next morning we eagerly ran to see our gifts, sometimes we also received small branches called “*virgács*,” a jolly sign that you had not ‘behaved’ properly the previous year. In more remote and traditional village communities, December 6 was an occasion for sharing and gift-giving to the poor. Often women with faces disguised visited homes where they received small gift packages containing mostly necessities/food. Originally called “Mikulás-walk” (*Mikulás-járás*), the

3 There is no country in which Saint Nicholas’ day is a public holiday. December 6 is a public holiday in Finland commemorating the country’s declaration of independence from Russia in 1917. Similarly, December 6 is constitution day in Spain, created in 1978. In Hungary, only All Souls’ Day, Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Pentecost are official religious public holidays. New Year’s Day, March 15, May 1, August 20, and October 23 are official civic public holidays.

custom was, by the 1960s, abandoned. A similar tradition remained part of children's folklore connected to nativity play on Christmas Eve, or later during the Easter festivities (Good Friday, Good Saturday). It is referred to as 'noise-making', *kolompolás*), interestingly the two aspects, darkness and noise-making at Easter (*tenebrae* – extinguishing the candles –, and *strepitus* – making big noise), are still part of the Western Christian liturgy. Later, as childhood innocence disappeared we often disguised ourselves either as Santa or Krampus pranking children during December 5-6th. To the question 'do you want to be Krampus' we more often than not eagerly agreed, well aware of the endless possibilities of fun and naughtiness.

Diversity sells, as Roland Robertson has aptly claimed, but heterogeneous actions, including rituals and symbols, also contribute to the widescale acceptance of the political system ("Glocalization" 29). Aside from the first two decades of state socialism in 1948–1988, ecclesiastical power was unquestionable and dominant in Hungary. By and large citizens obeyed the laws and respected civil leadership and the increasing leading role of religious institution and clergy. It is not the socialist state alone that can be accused of colonizing Christmas, for most political regimes freely alter meanings and trappings of customs and celebrations to suit their own agendas (for a description of Nazi Christmas see, for example, Perry, "Christmas as Nazi Holiday: Colonising the Christmas Mood", 263-289). We do well to remember the infamous statement by Lenin in the early 1920s against the holy day of St. Nicholas: "let the peasants pray to electricity"; or the young pioneers' song: "the smoke of the factory is better than the smoke of Incense." Following the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe in 1945, a war on religion was waged, and with that the mutation of Christmas ensued. Yet, what was interesting is that the day of Saint Nicholas was not obliterated, and the Feast of the Fir Tree (*Fenyőfaünnep*) could not overtake the native name for Christmas (*Karácsony*). Throughout socialism Santa continued to bring small gifts in children's shoes as Father Winter on the eve of December 5th. Unlike these, the Soviet Mrs. Santa and their grandchild, Snegurochka (Snow Maiden) – dubious popular culture characters originating in the 19th century – were never domesticated into Hungarian winter celebration (Piters-Hofmann "Out of the Deep Woods and Into the Light: The Invention of Snegurochka as a Representation of Russian National Identity" 276-291).⁴ At the same time, the American Mrs. Santa, or Mrs. Claus, known for making cookies with the elves, caring for the reindeer, and preparing toys with Santa, has been slowly elevated to international fame.

4 It was the Russian playwright Alexander Nikolaevich Ostrovsky (1823–1876) who concocted the character of Snow Maiden from folk tales and 19th century mysticism. His play *The Snow Maiden* (1873) was turned into an opera by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a stage production that has since been revered as a unique Russian Christmas feat analogous to the two-act ballet composed by P. I. Tchaikovsky the *Nutcracker* in the West.

During socialism, Santa Claus/Mikulás did not pose a threat to the establishment; the complex was transformed into an acceptable and an inoffensive anti-state ritual. It would have been misguided on the part of leadership to imagine that the entire medieval history of Christianity could be annulled. Attested by scholarly treatments, twelfth and thirteenth-century French religious music dramas depicting miracles of Saint Nicholas (*Ludus super Iconia Sancti Nicolai* by Hilarius, *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* by Jean Bodel) have survived in many mummeries and folk plays, splendid glocal examples of vernacular moralizing dramas since medieval times (Albrecht, *Four Latin plays of St. Nicholas*; Millington, “The Truro Cordwainers’ Play: a “New” 18th Century Christmas Play;” Ramey, “Jean Bodel’s *Jeu de Saint Nicolas*: A Call for Non-Violent Crusade”). The longevity of the cult of the Byzantine bishop Saint Nicholas is attested by the fact that in Hungary, there are 47 settlements with the name Saint Nicholas (formerly there were more), and the number of churches and chapels whose patron saint is Saint Nicholas has remained at over 150. Some of these (for example Aracs, Tihany, Gyulafehérvár, Szeged) are of considerable medieval, Byzantine origin (Bálint, *Ünnepi Kalendárium* 398). This history points to the religious foundation of the Hungarian state millennia ago when Christianity served a variety of fundamental functions from regulating the lives of citizens to ordering and maintaining seasonal ritual cycles. Communist ideology could not obliterate the long Christmas holiday season, decided originally in 567 by the Council of Tours, as the period between December 25 and January 6 was “declared the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany to be one unified festal cycle” (Forbes, *Christmas: A Candid History*, 27).

Despite strict choreography and canons, official and popular festivities bred new contexts, forms and ritual activities. Since the elevation of Christianity into a state religion, winter festivals have been continually adapted to the changing sociocultural environment; the courts of the Byzantine emperors of Constantine Vth in the eighth century, and Basileos hundred years later still celebrated Brumalia and the pagan feasts. This lends credence to Lévi-Strauss’ notion that: “Very old elements are thus shuffled and reshuffled, others are introduced, original formulas perpetuate, transform or revive old customs” (Lévi-Strauss “Father Christmas executed” 43). Whether remnants of the ancient Roman winter festivals of Saturnalia, Dies Natalis Solis Invicti (December 25, Birthday or Feast of the Unconquered Sun), the Kalends, Brumalia, Parentalia and Lupercalia (mid-February) were actually incorporated into the Christian Christmas-New Year seasonal rituals remains to be detailed, similar to the old Germanic and Fenno-Scandinavian Yule traditions. Investigating this question more than a century ago, Sir James Frazer was also flailing about in the dark, the lack of reference to Santa Claus in his 12-volume *magnum opus* aptly illustrating the late capitalist success of globalized Christmas (*The Golden Bough*, 9. 237-238).

Christmas in Hungary has mainly been regulated according to prescribed patterns and rituals in accord with the Roman Catholic calendar. The word for Christmas (*Karácsony*) entered the Hungarian language in the 15th century, most likely through religious doctrine and education. Santa (*Mikulás*) and his accomplice the Krampus (*Krampusz*) is of much more recent vintage, originating from mid-19th century Slavic and Austrian middle-class festivals. The exact date of its western European origin, as well as the cultural importation of the festival throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire, has resulted in a “barren controversy” as some scholars have hinted earlier (Toldy “Meddő kísérlet a Krampus eredetének kiderítésére”, Katona *Irodalmi tanulmányok*; for more analyses see Hauschild, *Weinachstmann. Die Wahre Geschichte*; Honigman “The masked face”; Rest und Seiser “The Krampus in Austria. A Case of Booming Identity Politics”; Ridenour *The Krampus and the old, dark Christmas*). What is known is that the first mention of Santa Claus/Mikulás can be read in various Hungarian journals and newspapers from the middle of the century. In 1862, for a short period, a Punch-like newspaper was published in Budapest by the name “*Krampuszok*” (Krampuses) edited by Viktor Szokoly. One sketch from the Budapest ‘Sunday Times’ of 1865 depicts a broom carrying Krampus standing behind Santa Claus. In no time, the bourgeois tradition of Santa/Krampus-walk and the construction of Christmas slowly gained currency throughout the country-side.

Despite regime changes and globalizing cultural influences, the Christmas-New Year religious holiday has remained a two-cycle period (theophany, epiphany); in popular tradition and economically one long Christmas season was created. As is customary, the holiday season begins with the first Sunday of Advent, and celebrations of two saints’ days with many folkloric customs (St. Catherine’s Day on 25 November, followed by St. Andrew’s Day on the 30th of the same month) and Saint Nicholas (December 6), closing with the last feast day of Saint Lucia (December 13). The making and giving of Advent calendars and the Advent wreath as presents, both Protestant inventions, spread throughout Europe, becoming part of popular holiday celebrations by the early 20th century. As an interesting parallel I mention that it was only in 1941 that the US Congress passed a joint resolution to secure the last Thursday of November for the Thanksgiving holiday and in so doing extending the Christmas season to four weeks. In Hungary, as in most of Central Europe, traditionally the second holiday cycle begins on December 6, unlike in current times when supermarkets start Christmas sales by the beginning of November, followed by Christmas and New Year, epiphany – officially the Three Kings Day or 6th of January in Western Christianity (19 January in Eastern Churches). The apex of the celebration concerns the revelation of God incarnate Jesus Christ (or his baptism) with a final phase of Carnival/Shrovetide/Mardi Gras. As in the medieval epoch, today’s winter ritual calendar is a period of frantic and boisterous activities with many local flavors after

the first Sunday of Advent, most commonly with the opening of the Christmas fair following Austrian *Kristkindlmarkt* or *Weihnachtsmarkt* customs (Carter, “Perchten and Krampusse: Living Mask Tradition in Austria and Bavaria”).

And then came the anni mirabiles of 1989–1990, walls came tumbling down, and democracy in various shapes and forms arrived in Eastern Europe. Accordingly, like most former Soviet-bloc states—Hungary entered a new era signaled by religious fervor and new forms of spirituality quickly replacing communist atheism. Contemporary right-wing governmental ideology is the heir to the inter-war era with its religious credo ‘God, nation, and family’ (*Isten, haza, család* – the slogan of the Fidesz-Christian Democratic Peoples Party). Coupled with this new fundamentalism, national myth of past greatness, remembrance of prehistoric empires and ruling dynasties (Scythians, Huns, and Avars), and national homogeneity bespeak cultural longevity and the putative existence of an ancestral terrain, Great Hungary (Kürti, “The plow and the horse: Political turmoil in a working-class district of Budapest”, 221-240; “Nomadism and nostalgia in Hungary” 217-246).

Strangely but not unexpectedly, like other Europeans, most Hungarians generally adhere to a secular ethos as only about one-tenth of the population attends church services, primarily on the major holidays of Christmas and Easter (Tomka, *Vallás és társadalom Magyarországon* 301). At the same time, a disproportionately large percentage belongs to alternative religions, quasi-churches or sects adhering to various supernatural or mystic powers. As I have argued previously, after three decades of systemic political change, new non-communist identity has continually been reinvented from pre-war fundamentalist religiosity, mythical heroic tales and even doubtful and recent folkloric traditions (Kürti, “Psychic Phenomena, Neoshamanism, and the Cultic Milieu in Hungary”; Kürti “Neoshamanism, National Identity and the Holy Crown of Hungary”). Increasingly, national and local festivals take on a religious air as symbols of state and ethnonational primordialism reemerge in liturgy and quasi-mythical celebration (Kürti László “Symbolism and drama within the ritualization of the Hungarian parliament” 41-63; Kürti László “Politics of festivals: fantasies and feasts in Hungary” 53-82). In this new religiosity, the family has been privileged as primordial setting for familial, local and national socialization. For this situation, Daniel Miller’s observation seems apt: “Christmas plays a crucial role in the objectification of the family as the locus of a powerful sentimentality and devotion” (“Christmas: An anthropological lens” 417).

Observable since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, this new national sentimentality has engulfed Christmas as well: Father Winter (*Télapó*) has been deliberately set aside as its alter ego Mikulás victoriously reemerged. Nowadays, Santa-Mikulás is conspicuous and pervasive and often accompanied by his side-kick Krampus, offering gifts and well-wishes to friends, family members or passers-by on the street or in

shopping malls. Despite its original German-Slavic tradition, Mikulás is the penultimate Magyar patriarchal figure, a process not without the influence of the 19th century American commercialized media image of Santa Claus (Hoegaerts, “Domestic Heroes: Saint Nicholas and the Catholic Family Father in the Nineteenth Century;” Nissenbaum, *The battle for Christmas*). Notwithstanding this globalized success, children’s songs have remained true to socialist glocal Christmas musical heritage. One of the most popular starts with the line “Mikulás is here, his coat is made of snow”; its socialist variant was: ‘Father Winter is here, his coat is made of snow.’ Every Christmas tens of thousands of children are taught to memorize another song, ‘Snowflakes are falling, come to us dear Santa’ (“*Hull a pelyhes fehér hó*”). The Hungarian composer László Rossa is credited with nationalizing it based on the well-known English song, ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star.’ That English tune itself is based on a French children’s song (“Ah! vous dirai-je, maman”), a tune also the melody of the well-known ‘Alphabet song’ and ‘Baa, Baa, Black Sheep’ known worldwide and utilized by many composers.

Since 1990, the state and local media, often these are the same, wholeheartedly participate together with the high clergy in national Hungarian Christmas beginning with the first Sunday of Advent. It is likely that most countries possess an official Santa Claus house and Hungary is no exception.⁵ The small town of Nagykarácsony (Bigchristmas) in western Hungary created its own House of Santa (*Mikulásház*) in 1995. It should be emphasized that the Hungarian settlement was only incorporated in 1952, with only 1300 inhabitants and possessing no (folk) traditions of any kind. Ingeniously, steadfast local elite designed the settlement’s coat of arms specifically to relate to Christmas nativity folk play. Uniquely in Hungary, perhaps even in Europe, to the best of my knowledge, it is the only settlement with a manger scene depicted on its coat of arms. To boost local economy, they invite children to write letters to Santa and visit his house from November 17 till December 24 in order to enjoy various shows, programs and concerts; the main patron for the entire festive month is (interestingly) not Santa but a designated governmental official.⁶ To meet visitors’ demand, the town’s invented tradition is unique in Hungary but pales in comparison to the extravaganza of the Joulupukki industry in Finland (Pretes “Postmodern tourism. The Santa Claus Industry” 1-15).

Childhood in the 21st century remains full of mysteries and contested identities and winter delivers its special charms as nature is transformed. The experiences of wintry ecosystems exhibit many similar work routines, behavior and games worldwide, the differences are considerable as well. For children three of the most classic winter activities are snowball fights, building a snowman and sledding. Today shops,

5 For example, in Russia it is Veliky Ustyug, 600 km north of Moscow, in Germany it is Himmelpfort, 90 km west of Berlin, in Finland it is Rovaniemi in Lapland, in Spain it’s Alicante, in France it’s Andilly.

6 See, the home-page: <http://www.nagykaracsony.hu/> (last accessed 02/09/ 2020).

restaurants and bars compete in offering special drinks, dishes, and delicacies available only during the Christmas season. It is not unusual to find bartenders, waiters, taxi drivers, and even policemen donning Santa's cap, some miniature Krampus horns, or even Rudolph's tiny antlers, signifying the singularity of the holiday season. Markets and fairs are standard practice during Christmas, popular nativity plays are produced at entrances of Roman Catholic churches or public areas as "living nativity scenes," with adults and children participating with a few animals--sheep or donkeys---, accentuating the Biblical milieu. Holiday spirit is more vivid and colorful than ever before and Santa Claus appears in numerous disguises and alterations as the old and the new, recent, and ancient elements vie with one another. Santa masterfully blends skillful honesty with artful deception and his entire character is made up of endless trickery, sleight of hand, and stories of mythical proportions. Hungarian Mikulás always carries his big sack, and participants cannot see actual gifts until Santa pulls them out. His sack is a true cornucopia, overflowing with sweets, occasionally toys and other small presents; for Hungarian families, however, presents were brought by a masked ambiguous figure representing Little Jesus (Austro-German *Kristkindl*) or Angels on Christmas Eve. The contemporaneous magic is underscored by the fact that Mikulás arrives from and departs to an unknown place. He is teleported everywhere – he has what it takes: Wanderlust and extra human strength.

In contrast to earlier days, today's Santa in Hungary descends from church towers, mayor's offices and kindergartens' rooftops as there are always willing policeman, fireman, or civil servants to volunteer for the job. One can even see, as in earlier decades, Santa and his accomplices carried by horse-drawn coach as reindeer have not entered Hungarian popular culture, an American invention from the early 19th century. Customarily, Santa is disguised as a portly, jolly, white-bearded man attended by his bedraggled Krampus; since the 1990s young women may also impersonate that devilish accomplice, an idea already depicted in Austrian Christmas postcard early in the 20th century. The implied mild eroticism has also contributed to the transformation of Santa and company into an ambiguous trickster play, one that allows a more transgressive role than the venerable Saint Peter proposed by Hynes and Steele (William J. Hynes and S. J. Steele, "Saint Peter: Apostle transfigured into trickster" 170).

Santa's presence has evolved into a grand procession, though somewhat of a lesser scale than the nationwide theatrical Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in The Netherlands, with opposing yet complementary qualities in order to harness misrule and advertise commercialized piety (Eversmann, "The Feast of Saint Nicholas in the Low Countries" 281-298). While affectionate and kind, his accomplice Krampus behaves frighteningly and at times cruelly as in the Alps region in Central Europe. As expected, the original function of the Santa tradition, rewarding those worthy and mildly punishing the others has been

reaffirmed. Such oppositions--a divinely magisterial Santa versus his repugnant underworld representative Krampus--are prescient reminder of *timor dei* (fear of God). Mystery, plurality and plurivocity are required components of the Gestalt of Santa/Krampus complex; it delivers, above all, a hopeful myth that our lives – despite hardships or suffering throughout the year – are meaningful, and that the future holds promise for all. A profane trickster, Santa conjures up one of the most sacred messages in a secular world: life is a fleeting illusion, love is stronger than hate, and the world is, or could be, a far better place if we all loved one other. To faithful believers, and not only children, Santa’s presence is an affirmation of humanity and the brotherhood of all people. The amalgamation of the feast of Saint Nicholas with that of the birth of Jesus into a joyous and commercial Christmas holiday season brings a special message for millions today, not only for Christians. It signals a syncretic rite of passage, a special end of the year celebration that is recognized worldwide as an inevitable part of our lives (Whiteley, “Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture”). As such, an interminable array of symbols, events and trappings follow as necessary ingredients: special drinks, plenty of sweets, seasonal music (Santa and Christmas songs and carols), media promotion (internet sites, feature films, television programs, musical, stage plays), community fairs and revelry.

The overwhelming importance of various kinds of sugar- based produce these days is astonishing as sugar consumption since the 18th century has been steadily growing; excessive Christmas consumption is a major factor.⁷ While Santa Claus greets members of households with chocolate, fruit and nuts, Christmas arrives with specially baked cakes. Christmas has been elevated to a festival of massive consumption (Belk, “Materialism and the making of the modern American Christmas,” 75-104). In Hungary, competitions and fairs for baking Christmas gingerbread cookies (*mézeskalács*) are regularly organized. Utilizing elements from traditional folk nativity plays (*betlehemezés*) is the most fashionable theme. The small town of Geresdlak leads the way as women recreate not only the Biblical manger-scene but their entire community in miniature gingerbread replicas.⁸ Walnut and poppy seed are the most important ingredients for the cake called “*bejgli*” (borrowed from German/Silesian diet), but fruitcakes fashioned after Austrian recipes are also in vogue. The special holiday Austro-German pastry is “Mohn-beugel,” although Stollen and Lebkuchen are more in vogue

7 The consumption of sugar reached an unprecedented proportion by the 20th century. From the 1800s to 1900 in Britain annual per capita consumption rose from 2 kg to 40 kg (Mintz, 1985: 73). World sugar production has been steadily growing ever since from 153 million metric tons in 2009 to 188 million metric tons in 2018. (Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/249679/total-production-of-sugar-worldwide/>, last accessed: 01/09/2020). The US, Germany and The Netherlands lead in sugar consumption: roughly 40 to 44 kg per person annually (the other developed countries follow: Ireland, Australia, Belgium, UK).

8 For the history of Italian creches tradition see D’Aponte (“Presepi: A Neapolitan Christmas ritual”).

these days all over Central Europe. According to widespread popular superstition “walnut” (*dió*) is a potent remedy against evil and bad luck; “poppy-seed” (*mák*) brings abundance good luck, and, for available girls, potential suitors. Furthering the special holiday spirit, adults consume “hot wine” (*forralt bor*), whereas for youngsters – especially in vocations and those in colleges and universities –, “*krampampuli*” is served. This latter is a German invention from the 18th century, a mixture made originally from brandy and Juniper berry. Traditional Nordic parallels are Swedish “*Julmust*”, or the Finnish “*glögg*.”

In local Christmas festivities, Santa Claus (*Mikulás*) was a man of darkness, an unseen persona of the night ably hiding from ordinary people. Since the late 20th century, in shifting from night to daytime, one of the mysteries of the Santa folklore has disappeared. A sign of the changing time, Santa today arrives during daylight with plenty of fanfare, revelry and accolades. To make his international rounds he – because unquestionably Santa has been male –, is expeditious and airborne, and much less muted than before. Even with his scandalous or frightening Krampus, or its other masked variations, Santa is not, as some would have it, deviant but a socially-sanctioned instructive moralizer. Culture heroes remind us about the inevitability of death, and the passing of time, and also reinforce presents, love and family harmony, as Eric Wolf proposed long ago (Wolf, “Santa Claus: notes on a collective representation” 147-155). As Margaret Mead expressed it: “Learning about Santa Claus can help give children a sense of the difference between a “fact” — something you can take a picture of or make a tape recording of, something all those present can agree exists — and poetic truth, in which man’s feelings about the universe or his fellow men is expressed in a symbol” (Mead and Metraux, *Some personal views*). The mythology of Santa Claus concerns important ethical questions that societies around the world hold fundamental – trust, credulity and lies. The philosopher Susanne Langer suggests that by fostering the myth of Santa Claus’ double standards we assist children in learning about fantasy, imagination and artistic development. To paraphrase Langer’s witty comment: Santa Claus cannot be taken out of the chimney (*Feeling and form. A theory of art*, 401). While most people accept that Santa’s myth is harmless, and is good for children to develop imaginative or role-playing, it is also a lie but a positive one, as Margaret Mead and Rhoda Meroux seemed to agree in their jointly published books (*An interview with Santa Claus; Some personal views*).

Curiously, Santa appears primarily not only as a superhuman transformative power but also by representing a myriad of possibilities for growth and change. Various cultural narratives of and about Santa Claus provide a fertile source of cultural reflection and critical reflexivity that leaves one feeling affectionate and thoughtful yet compliant with cultural codes of flexibility, variation and creativity. Santa Claus, after all, is a coeval *corpus mysticum* – like Christ or Saints, as Ernst Kantorowicz demonstrated earlier (*The king’s two bodies*) –, a globally accepted phenomenon with no

nominalistic essence of any of his given particulars. As the archetypical figure of Christmas holiday, to succeed in local environs Santa and his national variations (Sinterklaas, Père Noël, Ded Maroz, Moș Crăciun) must remain out of the ordinary (Stronach and Hodkinson, "Towards a Theory of Santa: Or, the Ghost of Christmas Present" 15-19). While the holiday season is prime time for global consumerist frenzy, Santa seems to float above it all. His *dramatis personae* cannot be criticized for blindness (offering gifts to all), nor blamed for the mischievousness of his associates (Befana, Knecht Ruprecht, Krampus, Pere Fouttard, Zwarte Piet), nor for causing and maintaining local social anxiety – this is generated globally, challenged and practiced locally. The racialized Dutch Zwarte Piet (Black Pete), though a mock figure of popular Christmas revelry in The Netherlands and remnant of Dutch colonial history and source of social contention by many these days, continues to thrive because of the mechanism of consumerism and gift-exchange (Rodenberg and Wagenaar, "Essentializing 'Black Pete': competing narratives surrounding the Sinterklaas tradition in the Netherlands" 716-728).

Celebrated globally and transformed locally, Christmas holiday has been turned into a glocal ritual with elementary transformative power shared between actors. Amalgamating local needs and interests with foreign and global trends, utilizing both positive and negative feelings and emotions, the holiday myth thrives because it fulfills different roles for different groups of people. As such, the fusion of global trends and local traditions often results in glocal conflicting inventions, as I have shown above. Although mediatized images are too numerous to discuss here, one can recall the enormous success of Christmas horror films that Lauren Rosewarne calls the genre of "festive violence" (*Analyzing Christmas in film*, 320-322; cf also Connelly *Christmas at the movies*). Films, such as the 1974 slasher *Black Christmas* only hinted at the possibility of general dangers that may upset the happy family at Christmas time. American cinemas welcomed *Christmas evil* in 1980, and *Silent night, deadly night* in 1984 by transmogrifying the friendly holiday characters into villains. The original Austro-German *enfant terrible* (Krampus) and evil Santa, for example, wreak mayhem in the Dutch film *Sint* (Saint, dir. Dick Maas, 2010), the US production *Krampus: The Christmas devil* (dir. Jason Hull, 2013), and the Italian *Il fondo al bosco* (Deep in the woods, dir. Stefano Lodovichi, 2015). Gore aficionados now even can enjoy feminized versions of horror films with maniacal kins of Santa and Krampus, modeled after the Germanic Frau Perchta and the benevolent Italian Befana (*Mrs. Claus* and *Lady Krampus* both in 2018 that followed the earlier *Mother Krampus* in 2017).⁹ Such offbeat

9 A brief list of feature film titles will suffice here: *The nightmare before Christmas*, *A Christmas horror story*, *Krampus I and II*, *Krampus origins*, *Krampus unleashed*, *Krampus the Christmas devil*, *Krampus: The devil returns*, *Krampus: The reckoning*, *Santa Claws*, *Santa's slay*, *Santa Claus: A horror story*, *Santa Claus: Serial rapist*. The Christmas horror genre requires a separate analysis (for example Jones, *Fright Xmas*).

cinematic detours not only rekindle Christian ethics as embedded in stereotyped family values (good wins out in the end) but, perhaps more importantly, challenge existing frames of social relations and identities by transcending sacrosanct moral references. Santa Claus is not merely good or evil, he can be both, and he is presented as a fallible avatar. He is married but curiously the couple has no children – not yet, in any case anyway – and perhaps that is why he is fatherly and caring for them. The miracle-worker patriarchal Santa, or as referred to humorously St. Nick, even has a brother, shown for example in the 2015 *Krampus: the Christmas devil*, telling us that scoundrels do exist and they are more often than not in our vicinity, a personalized environment we all want to think of as safe and secure.

In closing, glocalization has increasingly been used by scholars to describe and analyze Euro-American capitalism and corollary changes of social relations and identities. These deterritorialized and reterritorialized landscapes of individual and collective relations are in concert with our transforming rituals and customs in interdependent ways. The glocalization of Christmas season with the preponderant role of Santa Claus and his miters (Krampus, Mrs. Santa, Angels, Zwarte Piet, servants, etc.) is just one of the most successful ritual examples discussed here. As Dunja Rihtman-Augštin has put it so deftly: today's Christmas holiday is a true "barometre of our mentality and our politics" ("Santa Claus in transition," 119). Is there a contradiction between faith, reinvented ceremonialism and late-capitalistic consumerism? I suggest not: for mainstream Christianity, conspicuous consumption in general and raucous behavior in particular are abominations that may be defeated by penitence as well as a wholehearted embrace of faith, a *raison d'être* of medieval miracle plays and the cult of Saint Nicholas (McKnight, *St. Nicholas*, 143). Contrarily, popular religions and secular believers accept the topsy-turvy world of festivals and syncretic religious for economic reasons but are more often than not better disposed to appropriate historical and modern traditions in order to elevate Santa Claus to a recognizable and domesticated world figure on local stages. With regard to global forces shaping locality and engendering national *couleurs globales*, I emphasize one particular feature: the category of intangible heritage as invented by UNESCO. Since initiating its international program identifying a representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2008, the actual number of traditions rose from 90 to approximately 464 in less than a decade. Roughly forty percent of the elements inscribed represent the Asia-Pacific area, with China leading with thirty traditions alone. However, the popular Krampus figure in Austria was elevated into national prominence when in 2014 UNESCO declared the Krampus-play (*Krampusspiel*) of the small Styrian town of Öblarn as part of intangible cultural heritage of humanity.¹⁰ It is not only young men who are thrilled by the buffoonery and the bawdiness

10 See: <http://www.krampus.st/cms/index.php>, last accessed: 3/09/2020.

connected to Christmas ritual, families around the globe enjoy gift exchange, cementing and forging kinship ties shrouded by mysticism, make-belief, and superstition. With such an extensive history of notable accomplishments, indeed stardom based on exciting glocal variations and incongruities, perhaps it is time to allocate to Santa Claus and December 6th the status of worldwide public holiday.

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Author's profile

László Kürti is Professor of Anthropology and Political Science at the University of Miskolc with a wide variety of research areas and a series of highly successful monographic and edited books, including *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (SUNY:2001).