I. Research articles

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Analogies between a pregnant woman and a cow in calf*

Abstract. The article presents the analogies that exist in the Polish language and Polish folk culture between a pregnant woman and a cow in calf. The data come from dialectal dictionaries of Polish, as well as from cultural records excerpted from 19th- and 20th-c. ethnographic sources. A number of analogies have thus been identified: similar conceptualisations of pregnancy, parallel valuation of the pregnant females, analogical practices for dealing with infertility, cultural directives connected with a pregnant woman and a cow in calf, the procedures for assisting in childbirth and calving, as well as in the cleaning after the delivery. There are also parallel ways of guessing the sex of the child or the calf or determining their sex. The transfer of the practices connected with human pregnancy and childbirth onto the cow reveals the importance of the latter for country dwellers in earlier times, as well as establishing a cultural equivalence between a pregnant woman and a cow in calf.

Key words: ethnolinguistics; folk culture; cow; woman; pregnancy; childbirth; puerperium

Introduction

The number of medical, religious and folk practices connected with a pregnant woman is greater than that of a cow in calf. The present article

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focuses only on the instances that emphasise the analogies between the two.[1] A thorough cultural worldview of folk tradition that refers to the perinatal period can be found in numerous publications by cultural anthropologists and linguists.[2]

The idea of comparing a woman with a cow may seem inappropriate. Apart from its basic meaning, *krowa* 'cow' in Polish may also denote 'a stupid and clumsy person (usually a woman)' (Karł SJP 2/564), 'a clumsy, lumbering and lazy woman' (SJP Dor 3/1161); *krówsko* is a pejorative term meaning 'a big cow' or 'a big and fat woman that moves in a slow, heavy and awkward way' (InSJP Bań 1/711), 'a graceless woman' (USJP Dub 2/230), 'a disgusting woman' (InSJP Bań 1/711). However, a different valuation of *krowa* transpires through Polish folk texts, in particular through songs, where the cow is portrayed as a cultural equivalent of a woman, especially a newly-married one: a breadwinner of the family, a mother, esp. a breastfeeding mother' (Kielak, forthcoming). As observed by Anna Krawczyk-Tyrpa, "the cow holds a special position in folk beliefs and values. It is one of the most honoured, praised and loved animals. [...] The cow is the basis of subsistence for a family, it delivers calves, produces milk and valuable organic fertiliser" (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 106–107). The special attention that is paid to the cow by country dwellers is also reflected in language, where one

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[2] A pregnant woman has been the object of research conducted by linguists, folklorists, and culture experts. The concept of pregnancy and childbirth is thoroughly analysed by Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak (2011); Krawczyk-Tyrpa (2001) examines Polish dialectal verbs and expressions that mean 'to become pregnant' and 'to give birth'; the assessment of a pregnant woman is discussed by Kozłowicz and Krasowska (2005); culture-dependent regulations and prohibitions connected with pregnancy and the postpartum period are described by Bystroń (1916) and Spittal (1938); contemporary directives concering pregnancy are discussed by Tymochowicz and Wójcicka (2006); customs accompanying the birth of a child are described by Kwaśniewicz (1981). A monograph by Henryk Biegeleisen (henceforth: Bieg Mat) is devoted to the mother and child in folk culture; two dictionary entries, *pregnancy* and *childbirth*, are found in Piotr Kowalski's cultural dictionary (henceforth: Kow Lek). A great amount of information concerning a pregnant woman and childbirth can be found in *Twórczość Ludowa*, a quarterly devoted to folk culture (see e.g. Adamowski 1999, 2001; Petera 1999; Ignaciuk 2003; Weremczuk 2009). A thorough linguacultural study of the beliefs, practices, and rituals connected with fertilisation, pregnancy, and delivery of domestic animals is Zhuravlov (1994). One of the chapters in the monograph is devoted to prophesying on the gender of the baby animals. Also vital is the dictionary entry *Otel* (Calving) by Plotnikova (2004) in *Slavyanskiye drevnosti*. To date, none of the Polish researches dealing with Polish folk culture has analysed the concept of a cow in calf.

finds many tender expressions used with reference to the animal, as well as to people. They reflect a mental and linguistic anthropomorphisation of the cow (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 109–110).

A pregnant woman and a cow in calf in the Polish language

A deeply-rooted linguistic view of pregnancy and child delivery provides us with two insights into these issues. Firstly, a newborn baby is considered to be the gift of God. Secondly, pregnancy is conceptualised mainly as a psychological or a spiritual state, as reflected in archaic expressions such as: *w stanie błogosławio*nym 'in a blessed state', *w stanie łaski* 'in the state of grace', *przy nadziei* 'hopeful' (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2011). Accordnig to etymologists, the original meaning of *ciąża* 'pregnancy' was 'mental and physical weight'.[3] A semantically related word was *brzemienność* 'pregnancy conceptualised as a burden', first recorded in the 18th century (Bor SE 78, Dług WSEH 99–100). In contemporary Polish, a pregnant woman is described as *ciężarna* 'pregnant, enceinte' ('a woman that carries the weight, for whom the weight is heavy'), less frequently as *brzemienna* ('pregnant, woman who carries the burden'). As observed by Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak (2011: 189), "the origin and primary meaning of the words clearly indicates that they fall within the worldview in which awaiting a baby is a physical weight, a burden". The same conceptualisations are found in colloquial Polish, e.g. *ciężarówka* 'a pregnant woman' (in standard Polish: 'a lorry'), *ciężarowiec* 'a husband or a partner of a woman expecting a baby' ('a weightlifter'), *zaciążyć* 'to get pregnant' ('to become heavy' or 'to have a grave and usually negative influence'). A plethora of expressions referring to a pregnant woman also occur in dialects (cf. Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 151–160) – those, however, will not be cited here as no analogies between them a cow in calf have been found.

A cow expecting its offspring is often referred to as *cielna* 'in calf' (SJP Dor 1/975); cf. the dialectal form *cielnica* 'a cow in calf' (Sych SGKasz 1/124), *cielniszcze* 'bovine placenta' (Sych SGKasz 1/124), *cielęciniec*, *cielętnik* 'bovine uterus' (Karł SGP 1/228). The pregnancy of a cow is defined as the period of "carrying" a calf. Thus, the conceptualisation of a cow's pregnancy is similar to that of a woman. What is more, the same adjectives, i.e. *ciężarna* and *brzemienna*, are used in both instances (Lin SJP 1/294).

Further analogies between them can be found in the terminology referring to childbirth. These occur, for example, in folk carrols, where a cow delivering its baby is compared to that of a woman: *krówejki byczki porodzili* 'cows

[3] Cf. *ciężar* 'weight'. [transl. note]

delivered calves' (BartPANLub 1/227), *krówka parę wołków urodziła* 'a cow gave birth to a couple of bull calves' (lit. 'ox-calves') (Bart Wąż 51). The verb *ocielić się* 'to calve, to give birth to a calf' (SJP Dor 5/615), 'to give birth to offspring' (InSJP Bań 1/1088), 'to give birth to a foetus, to give birth to a calf' (Lin SJP 1/294), is conceptualised in a similar manner as the verb *urodzić* 'to give birth to a child', when the baby has just left the uterus through the vaginal passage. Hence, in some Polish dialects we find such expressions referring to childbirth as *wypaprzyć się, wypatroszyć się* 'to eviscerate' or *wysypać* 'to get out of the uterus' (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2002: 164). Many dialectal expressions indicate the horizontal position of the woman: *zlegnąć/zalegnąć*, *wëleżec*, *przińc do leżenia* 'to lie down' (Krawczyk-Tyrpa 2001: 163–164), as well as of the cow: *ulęgnąć* (Karł SJP 6/23), *położyć* (K5 Krak 273, ZWAK 1885/11) 'to lie down'.

Childbirth and the birth of a calf are turning points, respectively, in the life of the woman and the cow. In folk dialects of Polish, a woman who "is pregnant for the first time" (Karł SGP 4/94), "delivers a baby for the first time" (SJP Dor 6/335), or "in the first postpartum period" (Karł SGP 5/298) is usually described as *pierwiastka* 'a primipara, a woman who bore a baby for the first time'. The term derives from *pierwiastek* 'someone doing things before others' (Lin SJP 4/691). The same lexeme is used to describe females of other mammals, including a cow 'after the first calf delivery' (common) or a cow 'in-calf for the first time' (Karł SGP 4/94).

Apart from numerous analogies between a woman and a cow in the postpartum period, there are also differences in the conceptualisation of the period itself. For instance, the woman is described as *położnica* 'a puerperal woman' (Lin SJP 4/884, SJP Dor 6/913). Earlier expressions, now considered obsolete, are *sześcioniedziałka* (Karł SGP 5/298) or *sześćniedziałka* 'a six-week puerperal woman', both words deriving from the old form *sześćniedziele* 'a six-week puerperium' (Karł SGP 5/298). All these expressions refer to the duration of the period; they also carry the information, of religious provenance, about the woman's impurity throughout that period and the need for her to undergo ceremonial purification. Such connotations are not present in the context of a cow. The only expressions recalled here are *ocielonka* (common), less frequently *wycielonka* 'a cow that has delivered its offspring' (Karł SGP 6/190, MAAE 1907/210); however, they only stress the very fact of birth being given to a calf.

1. Fertilisation

In traditional culture, a child is considered a gift of God and married couples with children are perceived as happy ones (Bieg Mat 7). A cow is also

said to "bring happiness when it bears calves" (MAAE 1914/60).[4] Calving is a happy and important moment both for the cow owner and his family, as is shown in the proverb *Jak sie krowa ocieli, bydzie wiesieli* 'When a cow has calved, you will be glad' (NKPP krowa 1). The theme recurs in New Year's wishes, when carollers wish the master a lot of children (*w każdym kątku po dzieciątku* 'have one child in each corner of the house') and a cow that will bear healthy offspring (*Niech wam sie krówka dobrze cieli* 'May your cow bear healthy offspring') (Bart PANLub 1/121).

An infertile cow was considered useless in the homestead (e.g., *która krowa jałowa, nie ma z niej pożytku* 'an infertile cow is useless'; Baz Tatr 146). By analogy, an infertile woman was treated with contempt in local communities (Bieg Mat 8). In order to prevent infertility, both a woman and a cow were fed with double-yolk eggs (Bieg Mat 10), for it is in the egg yolk that the embryo is located (Kow Lek 174). Another common practice was the use of blessed herbs in the treatment of infertility. Women would drink periwinkle decoction (Bieg Mat 12); other plants used to fight off infertility included: sagebrush, mayweed, catmint, parsnip, garden parsley, cinquefoil, nettle, rosemary, or sage (ZWAK 1895/163–164). To boost a cow's sexual desire (*biegać się*, lit. 'to run'), the animal was fed with the red clover called *bieganiec*,[5] stonecrop mixed with salt, or roasted barley (Bart Wąż 267); to increase the chances of conception, the cow was given bread with blessed herbs, with *maik* or *śliz* 'pieces of a green bough decorated with ornaments, used to welcome spring' (ZWAK 1888/117, reprint Wisła 1903/321), cornflower, or rue (ZWAK 1885/39). The fertilising power, based on magic and folk beliefs, was also ascribed to vaginal discharge of both a puerpera and a cow in the oestrus period (folk Pol. *latująca krowa*); women were given the blood lost during the delivery to drink (Bieg Mat 13), while cows were given milk of the cow in the oestrus period (Dwor Maz 195). Also important were the genitals of fertile animals. For instance, women were fed with dried and milled genitals of the hare (Bieg Mat 10), whereas cows with a dried and powdered ox penis (MAAE 1896/225). It was believed that both an infertile woman and an infertile cow increased their chances of conception by simply eating or drinking something associated with the act of fertilisation (Bieg Mat 15).

People also tried to induce fertility in other ways. For instance, in the region of Dobrzyń (central Poland), after performing the custom of *oczepiny*, the bride was asked to sit on the groom's lap. Then, the best man poured water into a bowl that was placed under the chair on which a newly-weded

[4] *Przynosi szczęście, gdyż darzy cielętami.*

[5] It is not clear what plant this is, possibly the red clover. [trans. note]

couple was sitting (Karw Dobrz 167) – this was supposed to bring offspring to the couple. To make a cow pregnant, people would sprinkle it with holy water before it was serviced by a bull. The custom was repeated whenever the cow crossed a river or a stream (ZWAK 1881/117).

To induce fertility in a barren cow, the cow was hit with an apple or a pear stick, both the apple and the pear tree being symbols of fertility. To stave off infertility, treated in folk tradition as a disease, a cow was hit three times with an aspen stick (K34 Cheł 169, MAAE 1896/225), commonly used to protect people from diseases (Marczewska 2002: 185). Moreover, the cow was bitten three times in the loins, which symbolically stood for biting infertility away (K34 Cheł 169). Through "sympathetic magic", the custom of hitting a cow by a pregnant woman with skirt straps to induce its calving was also popular (K34 Cheł 169). Eequally important was the custom of hanging *strzępy* 'the leftover yarn' around the cow's neck (*aby się jej wiązało*, lit. 'to make it tie up', i.e. to make it pregnant) (Dwor Maz 195). According to Oscar Kolberg, "when a cow is in its oestrus cycle but cannot get pregnant, it should go through an open door, or a double-winged gate, and under the girl standing astride and perched firmly on the wings" (K34 Cheł 169).

To cure infertility in cows, people used the *sacramentalia*, i.e. the blessed objects. For instance, a cow would be tied around with a thread taken from the white baptism cloth (K34 Cheł 169); a cow was also rubbed with a blessed tablecloth in its loins and rump (K34 Cheł 169); cows were fed the salt blessed on St Agatha's day (TL 1998/2–3/19), the salt blessed on Easter Saturday (MAAE 1904/65), the remnants of *święconka* 'a sampling of Easter food blessed on Easter Sturday' (TL 1998/2–3/19), blessed herbs or *opłatek* 'Chrismas wafer' (TL 1998/2–3/19).

Many practices to make a cow pregnant originate from imitative (sympathetic) magic. For instance, it was believed that only women could take a cow a bull for fertilisation (Kot Urok 93); however, it was forbidden to lead a cow over a bridge for fear of making it "as empty as a hole under the bridge" (ZWAK 1885/97).[6] Cows were never serviced by bulls after sunset (ZWAK 1886/97, K48 Ta-Rz 284, Wit Baj 152, Kot Urok 92), a natural obstacle for many activities in the homestead, because they could develop fear of the act (*płochałyby się*) (ZWAK 1886/97). It was also believed that having a cow serviced by the bull after sunset could take happiness away (Wit Baj 152). To increase the chances of conception, a cow serviced by a bull was not milked "until the following day" (MAAE 1910/66, 91, ZWAK 1890/205);

[6] *Pusty jak dziura pod mostem.*

water was poured on the animal, whose back was also rubbed with a stick in order to help the sperm reach the egg (Dwor Maz 195); the kneading-trough was turned upside down, potato peels were put on it and fed to the cow (ZWAK 1885/39). The kneading-trough in folk culture is conceptualised as an important wedding item: it was used during the preparations for the wedding ceremony, when the bride and groom headed for the church, and, most importantly, during the custom of *oczepiny*, at which the bride was asked to sit on the kneading-trough and thus prepare to fulfil her role in procreation.

People have always tried to influence the gender of both the baby's and the calf. Because a baby boy was preferred to a baby girl,[7] many means were used to help the woman bear the former (Bieg Mat). On farms, however, a heifer was more expected because it "helped increase the livestock" (Bart PANLub 1/105). It was forbidden to milk a cow on the day it was led to the bull if it was to bear *cieliczka* 'a heifer' (K48 Ta-Rz). Moreover, such a cow had to undergo other practices: drinking a concoction of cress seeds and *śmietanka* 'cream', with both ingredients mixed in *przęślica* 'the table' (K7 Krak 91), or tying up a few hairs from its tail to form a floccus (Kot Urok 93).

It was commonly believed that a vistit from a woman on Christmas Eve augured the birth of a female baby, whereas a visit from a man augured a baby boy (Bieg Mat 12). By analogy, a woman's visit apparently brought the birth of a female calf to the homestead, while a man's visit brought a male calf (MAAE 1914/215, Kot Urok 115, K42 Maz 390, Dwor Maz 32, ŁSE 1961/88, Łse 1974/58, Bart PANLub 1/105). In the area of Ropczyce (south-eastern Poland), people believed that the gender of the calf was determined by the act of sneezing on Christmas Eve: a sneezing woman augured a heifer (*cieliczka*), whereas a sneezing man was to bring a bullock (*byczek*) to the homestead (ZWAK 1886/87). It was also widely believed that an encounter with a woman while leading a cow to a bull to be serviced was to cause the birth of *jałówka* 'heifer'. An encounter with a man in a similar situation was to bring a bullock (Udz Wet 2).

People also believed that the gender of both the calf and the baby might be determined by the physical appearance of the cow in calf and the pregnant woman, respectively. A good-looking woman with a round belly that felt the movements of her baby on the right side of her stomach was thought to give birth to a baby boy. Women who looked unhealthy, had a flat belly and

[7] "The parents' desire to have a boy comes from primeveal times, when the son was not only a useful hand in the homestead but the performer of the ancient cult of the dead. The father could only rest in the afterlife if he begat a son, who would feed his soul in the grave with food and drink" (Bieg Mat 19).

felt the movements on their left side were to expect a baby girl (Bieg Mat 27–28; cf. Spittal 1938: 104).[8] Similarly, a cow lying on its right side after fertilisation (Bieg Lecz 156) and having a bigger left side during pregnancy (ZWAK 1890/205) was believed to bear a bullock. Conversely, a cow lying on its left side (Bieg Lecz 156), with a bigger right side (ZWAK 1890/205) was thought to give birth to a heifer.

2. Pregnancy

Pregnancy is an exceptional state, when both the pregnant woman and the cow in calf enjoy a certain measure of privilege because of the attention that is paid to the unborn baby. In Polish folk culture, a pregnant woman was given special care so that "no harm was done to the foetus" (Bieg Mat 29). She was exempted from hard household chores on the farm and her pregnancy cravings had to be fulfilled. A cow in calf was treated with similar care: farmers had to be careful in order not to hit the animal in the nostrils (Dwor Maz 195); to minimalize the risk of miscarriage, various practices were carried out, e.g. the cow's belly was rubbed with an Easter tablecloth, a pin was dug into the cow's tail, the cow was fed with a mixture of bread and southernwood (Dwor Maz 195). When a pregnant cow was gored by the cattle, miscarriage was prevented by feeding it with three chips from a ceiling beam, three chips from the kneading-trough, three chips from the peel mixed with two and a half leaves of periwinkle, hidden either in bread or in hot potatoes before sunrise (ZWAK 1892/262). The animal was also fed with a piece of furred hide from a young hare (ZWAK 1881/124). Salted carrot was served to the cow in the first half of pregnancy (before week 20). After calving, the animal was to be fed onion with salt or butter to induce lactation (ZWAK 1881/117).

Cows were not milked before calving (they were *zapuszczane* 'neglected' or *zasuszane* 'dried'; Bart Wąż 268–269) because the milk was needed to enable the calf in the womb to grow into a robust offspring (*bo już ten cielak w łonie matki potrzebował żyć* 'because the calf in the womb had to get a life') (Bart Wąż 268–269). It was believed that a cow that is milked up until the very moment of calving might bear a small weak and skinny offspring (Bart Wąż 268–269).

Special care offered to the cow and its offspring stems from folk beliefs in witches that could cause miscarriage (the cow may abandon (*porzucić*)

[8] It was thought that "boys arise from the right side, wheras girls from the left side". The origins of this superstition are connected with a common belief pertaining to the shape of the uterus, which was thought to consist of two halves: the right and the left one (Bieg Mat 29).

its offspring) (K7 Krak 126, reprinted in Wisła 1903/147) by incensing the animals with savin juniper, a plant commonly used by women as an abortifacient. In order to avoid miscarriage, the cow had to cross over a flail, a birch broom, a doorstep with a padlock wrapped in tablecloth (MAAE 1914/61), or other apothropaic objects. Slavs also placed a flail at the bed of a woman in labour to avoid miscarriage (Slav Tol 5/486).

Country dwellers believed that the behaviour of both a mother-to-be and the people that surround her may highly influence the life of the offspring. Therefore, pregnant women were not allowed to touch sharp objects. For the sake of the baby, the woman was not allowed to perform any activities that involved bending, cutting, chopping, or logging (Kozłowicz and Krasowska 2005: 97). The most prevalent prohibitions also extended to their partners. For instance, the men were not allowed to use knives for cutting or axes for chopping wood (Bart Wąż 296–297) during the so-called "holy evenings", i.e. the period between Christmas and New Year. In magical thinking, chopping or cutting an object may affect both the baby or the calf: the baby may be born with a cleft lip or a birthmark (Kozłowicz and Krasowska 2005: 97), while the calf may be born with a slit throat or without a leg (Bart Wąż 296–297) – this follows the conviction that "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed" (Frazer 1996 [1922]: 12).

Bans on sewing (Bart Lub 34–35, TL 1992/1–2/42, TL 1995/4/5, TL 1998/2–3/20, Bart Wąż 296) and spinning (TL 1998/2–3/20, Bart Wąż 296) were also activated, in particular after sunset during the "holy evenings": this was a blessed and sacred time, in opposition to everyday life. A violation of these prohibitions could result in the cow not calving at all (Bart Lub 34–35, TL 1995/4/5). Other problems could also surface: "unnecessary things may be left behind in the cow's body" (TL 1995/4/5),[9] the cow could give birth to "neither a bullock nor a heifer" (TL 1992/1–2/42),[10] the cow may go blind (TL 1998/2-/3/20), the calf may be born "with its bottom sewn up" (Bart Wąż 296).[11] All forms of tying or sewing up were considered responsible for "blocking all activities, including the development of the foetus and the delivery" (Kow Lek 59). The prohibitions on sewing, knitting, spinning, or tying up sheaves of grain in the field also pertained to pregnant women (Kow Lek 59).

Many of the regulations and prohibitions were based on knot magic (also known as the magic of Alcmene), that involved the acts of opening and closing, binding and untying knots: these were believed to affect the

[9] *Bo sie tam pozaszywa coś, co niepotrzebne.*
[10] *Ni to byka, ni krowę.*
[11] *Z zaprządniętym tyłkiem.*

delivery. Therefore, a pregnant woman was not allowed to cross over fences, ropes, chains, or pumpkin and cucumber vines (Petera 1999: 22). By analogy, a cow was not allowed to cross over *łyka* 'reins made of phloem' (ZWAK 1881/117) used for tying up horses, so that they do not constrain the delivery. For a pregnant woman, crossing over such objects carried the risk of the umbilical cord being wrapped around the baby's neck, which was believed to cause the suffocation of the baby (Petrera 1999: 22).

The changes in the body and in the life of a woman during her pregnancy, as well as her symbolic impurity, caused the woman to be symbolically isolated, both during the pregnancy and the postpartum period (Bystroń 1916). A pregnant woman was considered a threat to crops and plant vegetation; she was not allowed to sow, plant vegetables, or start the harvest; she was also exempted from many household chores, e.g. baking bread and cakes, making pickled cabbage, milking the cow, drawing water from the well (because it dries the well and lets vermin in), performing any important function during important ceremonies, such as wedding or baptism (Kwaśniewicz 1981: 104). In this regard, there is no analogy between a pregnant woman and a cow in calf, nor is there one in their dealings with evil forces. Women were thought to possess demonic features and so were negatively stigmatised (Pal Zer 12), as reflected in the proverb *The devil brings bad luck to the pregnant woman* (Kow Lek 59).[12] In contrast, cows were not conceptualised as incarnations of evil forces.[13]

3. Childbirth

Another domain where symbolic isomorphism can be found is the analogy between the female body and the interior of the house, as exemplified in various customs concerning the opening of doors, windows, stoves, locks, wardrobes, and trunks. These items were considered to symbolically open the passage from the world of mortals to that of the dead (Kow Lek 473–474). By analogy, the practice of opening the door of the barn during calf delivery (Dwor Maz 195) symbolised the opening of a cow's womb.

At childbirth, the woman was always assisted by an experienced midwife called *babka* (Kwaśniewicz 1981: 104), while men always assisted in calving (Bart Wąż 268). To help in the delivery of a baby or a calf, various practices

[12] *Jak kobieta nosi, to diabeł złe jej przynosi.*

[13] In Polish folk culture, a cow is a divine animal, for it is God that brings it into life (MAAE 1904/30, Zow Bib 68). In folk beliefs, the devil never assumes the shape of (*deboł się nie obraco*) a cow, a pigeon, a donkey, or an ox (Lud 1899/365). However, it was believed that the devil may appear as a black cow (K35 Przem 232, Sim Wierz 255, Bart Wąż 301).

were followed. Thus, the woman in labour was girded with the cord of St Francis or with a stole worn by a priest during liturgical services (Bieg Mat 51). The cow's back, in turn, was rubbed with an Easter tablecloth (Dwor Maz 195). Men's trousers were placed under the woman's back (Bieg Mat 58–59), while the cow was rubbed with them (Dwor Maz 195): this practice with reference to child delivery stems from a very old tradition of "experiencing" labour pains by the husband of the puerpera, widely known as the *couvades* (Bieg Mat 59). In the case of cows, a difficult delivery could result from various spells that were undone with the aid of various objects and practices, e.g. by people rubbing themselves with trousers or other garments turned inside out (Marczewska 2012: 229). To alleviate labour pains, the cow was fed with *nowe latki*, figures in the shape of animals baked for the New Year (K40 MazP 86).

Slavs believed that the duration of labour could be reduced by using a broom, which also protected the puerpera and the newborn baby (Vinogradova and Tolstaya 1993: 13, 19). In Polish beliefs, a broom, placed with its head turned upside, was thought to impede the birth of the calf (ZWAK 1886/ 97, ZWAK 1890/205). For southern Slavs, an inverted broom placed in the door or drawn on it was to protect the home dwellers from evil spirits (Vinogradova and Tolstaya 1993: 12). A similar function was ascribed to the broom in calf delivery.

Labour was also thought of as a special moment of crossing the boundary between the so-called *orbis exterior* (the external world) and *orbis interior* (the internal world), during which "the new" comes from "the outer into the inner world" (*z tamtego do tego świata*) (Kow Lek 472).[14] The reverse passage was possible but this meant that the local community was obliged to control the contact with the afterlife (Kow Lek 472). In traditional culture,

[14] It was believed that a heifer is born at the proper time, *viz.* after 285 days of gestation, whereas a bull is born a week after the 285-day gestation period (Udz Wet 2). The middle of the week was considered the best moment for childbirth and calving. A baby born on a Wednesday or a Saturday (the days of the Virgin Mary) was expected to be good, obedient, and hard-working (Kul Wiel 3/105). Babies that were born on Tuesdays and Thursdays were thought to be wealthy and happy in the future (Wisła 1905/156); nobody could jeopardise a baby born on a Wednesday (ZWAK 1878/127, Bieg Mat 123) because it was immune to evil spirits (K15 Poz 103). Similarly, a calf born on a Wednesday was not affected by witchcraft (MAAE 1904/25). It was believed that the worst day to bear a baby or a calf was either the beginning or the end of the week. Thus, a baby born on a Sunday was believed to be lazy (Petera 1999: 22); similarly, a cow born on a Monday (ZWAK 1886/97, ZWAK 1890/205) or Friday (ZWAK 1890/205) was thought to give little milk in the future. For a cow to deliver its calf during daytime, it had to be taken to the bull to be serviced during the day (K7 Krak 91). Daytime, especially the morning, was considered the best moment for the birth (Szadura 2012: 262).

it was believed that one should not get rid of one's possessions (Kow Lek 472) when in contact with the *sacrum*.

Thus, on the day after the childbirth (Lud 1924/62) or the birth of a calf (a common belief), during the first three days after the childbirth or the birth of a calf (ZWAK 1881/118, K19 Kiel 211), or even the whole week after calving (ZWAK1881/118), nothing in the house was to be lent to others (ZWAK 1881/118, ZWAK 1886/98, ZWAK 1887/29, ZWAK 1889/72, ZWAK 1890/205, MAAE 1910/66, 131, K19 Kiel 211, K17 Lub 79, K15 Poz 125, K48 Ta-Rz 285, Wit Baj 153, Bart Wąż 270–271, Tymochowicz and Wojcicka 2006: 38). In particular, fire (K17 Lub 79, Lud 1924/62), kerosene, matches (Lud 1924/62–63), or money (K48 Ta-Rz 285, MAAE 1910/13) were not to be lent to other people; by analogy, alms were not given to the needy (ZWAK 1881/118, ZWAK 1885/39, MAAE 1910/131, K48 Ta-Rz 274). Dairy products were not sold during that period (Lub 1924/63). All these customs and practices were used to protect the baby from poverty (Tymochowicz and Wójcicka 2006: 38) or unhappiness (ŁSE 1963/134, Lud 1924/59). Other practices were also carried out to protect the calf from hunger or to protect the cow from losing its milk (K17 Lub79, Lud 1924/63).

A cow after calving and its newborn offspring were particularly vulnerable to the harmful activities of witches. Therefore, animal owners did not give anything to strangers or would not let them into the barn for fear of those strangers casting a spell on the newborn calf (K48 Ta-Rz 274, MAAE 1910/280). Wells were closely observed so that witches could not draw water from them at midnight, thus taking away the milk from the *ocielonka* (the cow that has just had its calf) (Kot Urok 88). If these rules were not followed, a number of problems could ensue: a cow could have little milk for its offspring (MAAE 1904/21), a witch could take the milk away (ZWAK 1881/118, ZWAK 1887/29, K19 Kiel 211, K17 Lub 79, K15 Poz 125, Kot Urok 88), the cow could die or its health could deteriorate (ZWAK 1890/250, ZWAK 1886/98, Lud 1924/63). The consequences could also affect the newborn calf: it could run away from its mother (ZWAK 1881/118, Bart Wąż 270–271), it could refuse to suckle (Bart Wąż 271), it might not eat enough (ZWAK 1885/39), it could loose its hair (ZWAK 1885/39), it might not grow properly (MAAE 1907/152, MAAE 1910/66), it could moo (ZWAK 1889/39) or "murmur as if it were a gaffer whispering a prayer" (MAAE 1904/21),[15] it could live no longer than seven years (ZWAK 1885/39). Finally, a violation of these rules could also negatively influence the farmers: they could bring bad luck to the homestead (ZWAK 1881/118, K17 Lub 79), they

[15] *Mruczało tak, jak dziad, gdy mówi pacierze.*

might propser no longer (K48 Ta-Rz 285, MAAE 1910/131), they could "lose/spend happiness" (*wydać szczęście*) (Wit Baj 153).

A primipara cow (*pierwiastka*) was treated with special care: on both of it horns people would tie pieces of strands that were normally used to lock in the warp strands on a frame loom (MAAE 1896/218); the cow was also sprinkled with poppy, blessed together with the *paska* (paskha, a traditional Easter dessert): it was believed that counting poppy seeds absorbs a witch to such an extent that she is not be able to take the milk away from the cow (Wisła 1903/323–324). People would walk around the animal three times with a burning candle called *gromnica* (lit. 'a thunder candle'),[16] then they made the sign of the cross with the candle along the cow's back and burnt a little of the cow's hair (MAAE 1896/218). Moreover, during the first milking of a primipara, the animal's udder was blessed with the sign of the cross performed with *gromnica*, with a little of the animal's groin hair also being burned (MAAE 1896/218).

A cow that calved at home was usually led to the barn after the delivery. This symbolic passage was connected with the custom of placing iron items (cleavers, padlocks, or axes) under the doorstep (ZWAK 1885/38): the items were believed to protect both animals and people during various moments of passage. The custom was equally important for puerperas and newborn babies before baptism, for the bride and groom during wedding, or for the dying (SSiSL 1/4/367). An old broom was also placed under the doorstep and used as an apotropaeon, a magical device that protected people from evil forces (ZWAK 1885/38).

4. The cleaning after the delivery

After the delivery of a baby or a calf, particular attention was paid to the placenta, a waste product of the labour. Being considered dirty and associated with death, the placenta was treated with particular caution (Kow Lek 476). For instance, it was buried in the garden or under the doorstep (Bieg Mat 62) in order to stave off illnesses from the young mother (Bieg Mat 62) or to protect the baby from getting lost (Dwor WMaz 28). The human placenta was usually buried with the umbilical cord turned up, which was to protect the puerpera from infertility (Bieg Mat 62);[17] the cow's placenta was buried in the ground (K48 Ta-Rz 285, MAAE 1910/131) but also in manure (Bart Wąż 269) or in the barn (Dwor Maz 196), so as to

[16] The candle was usually placed in windows during storms for protection and was lit at a dying person's bed (or actually placed in the person's folded hands). [editor's note]

[17] A common practice among the Slavs was to take the placenta away from home to remote places and bury it, e.g. at a crossroads (Kow Lek 476).

keep the cattle in good health. It was believed that the placenta should be placed in roughly the same location as the cattle (Slav Tol 3/589). Originally the placenta was buried deep in the ground to protect it from being taken away by strangers. Symbolically, taking the placenta away is tantamount to taking away the living creature that discharged it (Slav Tol 2/200). It was also thought that the placenta dug up and torn by dogs or cats may cause complications with the woman's next delivery (Spittal 1938: 106) or render the calf more susceptible to various illnesses (Bart Wąż 269). If the placenta was eaten by pigs, the cow might become infertile (K48 Ta-Rz 285, MAAE 1910/131).

Rituals and practices performed after the birth of the offspring were to strengthen both the puerpera (Spittal 1938: 107) and the cow (Kot Urok 112, TL 1991/2/39), to secure good health for them (MAAE 1914/77, TL 1991/2/39) and to ensure the quality of the milk (MAAE 1907/115, K45 Gór 502, TL 1991/2/39). Since both the woman and the cow were exposed to evil spirits in the postpartum period (considered transitional between life and death), many practices were doubly motivated: they were to bring physical recovery after the pains of labour and, in the spiritual domain, to protect the woman or the cow from whitch spells (ZWAK 1879/31, ZWAK 1885/39, K17 Lub 155, K5 Krak 300, Bart Lub 31). One popular practice of this kind was to give the puerpera or the *ocielonka* a southernwood concoction (K15 Poz 128, K7 Krak 128, see also Spittal 1938: 107). Cows were also given a concoction made of herbs blessed on the feast of the Assumption (the feast of Our Lady of the Herbs), most preferably collected in the fields in another parish (MAAE 1910/52–53): those included *dziewięciornik* 'bog-stars, parnassia' (MAAE 1907/115, K45 Gór 502), common mugwort, the press cake (Dwor Maz 195), *mocnostój* 'thyme' (Kot Urok 112, K15 Poz 128, K7 Krak 128, ZWAK 1887/54),[18] and *bodziszek łąkowy* 'meadow geranium' (K15 Poz 131, K7 Krak 131), mixed with flour and salt (K17 Lub 155, MAAE 1910/85). Sometimes such objects as combs, cleavers, padlocks, or grindstones were put into the herb decoction (ZWAK 1879/54); the cow might be given a drink made of wheat bran (Dwor Maz 195, TL 1991/2/39), *kwaśnica* 'sour cabbage soup' with rye bran (ZWAK 1881/118, K45 Gór 503), or linseed, garlic and Christmas wreaths ground in a mixing bowl (MAAE 1914/77). Cows were also fed warm cabbage, herbs (St John's wort, common mugwort, tansy), eggs, rye flour, salt, pork fat (K48 Ta-Rz 53, MAAE 1910/131), or the hay from the the Christmas table (Bart Lub 31).

[18] The common term for thyme is *macierzanka*; the term used here, *mocnostój*, is probably the same herb. [editor's note]

Before returning to everyday routine after the delivery, both the woman and the cow were considered ceremonially unclean.[19] Thus, being a danger to the local community (Kow Lek 473), they had to undergo a ritual of purification. With reference to cows, one of such purification practices was censing animals with blessed herbs (ZWAK 1881/118, ZWAK 1885/25, Kot Urok 91, TL 1998/2–3/19), with yew (Wisła 1903/161, Bieg Lecz 30, Baz Tatr 163), with incense blessed on the feast of the Epiphany (MAAE 1898/176), or with myrrh, used on "the new Friday" (the first Friday after the new moon) (Wisła 1903/330). Blessed herbs were also brought to the house of the puerpera (Kow Lek 476) and to the barn (ZWAK 1885/39).

In a ritual of purification of a newly calved cow, the sign of the cross was made on its body with an old broom (Kow Lek 316). Next, the broom was left at a crossroads and covered with pig manure (K7 Krak 91). In order to keep the cow clean (Etnl 1995 Biłog 155–156), such items as knives and combs were left next to it.

As far as women were concerned, all isolation practices resulting from their uncleanliness were abrogated by a ceremony called *wywód*. This involved permitting the puerpera to come back to normal life in the local community, accompanied with the act of blessing.[20]

The cleaning practices that were used with reference to a calved cow mainly concerned its milk: they were intended to improve milk quality, to purify it, to guard the milk against witches, and to provide high milk yield. To stave off evil forces that would decrease milk production, a cow was sprinkled with the holy water (Bart Wąż 182). The relevant customs involved washing the teats of the cow with the holy water (ZWAK 1879/31), marking the cow's horns with blessed chalk (ZWAK 1885/39), or wrapping its horns and udders with phloem that had been used for tying herbs blessed on the feast of the Assumption (ZWAK 1879/31) – it was blelieved that milk accumulates in the cow's horns and udders.

Both the milk of the woman and of the cow was conceptualised in a variety of ways. For instance, it was called *młodziwa*, lit. 'fore milk' (SJP Dor 4/765), or *siara* 'colostrum' (SJP Dor 8/186). Yellow in colour and rich in fat, the colostrum contains all the essential nutrients necessary for the growth and development of both the child and the calf. The milk of the

[19] A woman in the postpartum period was isolated from the local community: this prohibition was similar to the ones imposed during her pregnancy. However, the latter were more numerous, which might be indicative of stronger social and religious pressure imposed on pregnant women during the gestation period (Kwaśniewicz 1981: 105).

[20] *Wywód* is defined as a religious ceremony during which a young mother is brought to church (SJP Dor 10/329) and blessed, thus being formally reintroduced to the congregation and symbolically purified (Bieg Mat 109).

ocielonka was conceptualised in a cultural context. Drawn before the calf's birth, the milk was believed to help guess the sex of the offspring. When boiled, the *ocielonka*'s milk usually produced the cheese called *siara*, which also indicated the sex of the animal, depending on its stiffness: a soft *siara* meant a heifer, a hard and thick *siara* announced the birth of a bull (Udz Wet 2). Moreover, the *siara* cheese was considered a child delicacy and was often sent to the neighbours as the sign of friendship (Kot Urok 91–92), used in making home-made noodles (e.g. the *haluszki*, a type of Slovak noodles; Bart Wąż 269–270), or cooked and given to the farm hens (Bart Wąż 269). Some Slavs used fore milk during a solemn and ritual meal, to which both the family and neighbours were invited (Slav Tol 3/590) – echoes of this old custom can be found in New Year greetings: *May each of your cows calve, then you will give cheese and butter form a healthy cow to your friends* (Bart PANLub 1/215).[21] The colostrum is also known to have an apotropaic effect: when mixed with chalk blessed seven times and poured in the hole drilled in a cow's horn, it was believed to ensure that the cow had a lot of milk and was protected against witches (Wisła 1903/332).

Concluding remarks

The analogies that pertain to a pregnant woman and a cow in calf are numerous, both in the Polish language and Polish folk culture. Similar conceptualisations are found, first and foremost, with reference to such aspects as pregnancy, the birth of the first child, or valuation of the pregnant females. Consequently, practices and rituals performed in order to confront infertility, the obligations and prohibilitions imposed on a pregnant woman or a cow in calf throughout the gestation period, or practices designed to facilitate labour and the cleaning after the delivery seem to be almost identical. The methods of predicting the sex of the baby or the calf also exhibit parallelisms.

Unquestionably, the customs and practices that relate to human pregnancy and childbirth are much more detailed and sophisticated, and go beyond the data analysed in this article. In the case of a cow, it is difficult to find information about folk practices for animal contraception, or the methods of aborting the foetus. There are no directives as to what should be done with the umbilical cord, or how to cope with a calf that is born in the amniotic sack. The status of a cow that dies in the postpartum period

[21] *Niech wam się krówka każda ocieli, poczęstujecie swych przyjacieli serem i masłem od krowy zdrowej.*

is also unaddressed. This, however, does not undermine the analogies that do exist; rather, it shows that the practices pertaining to cows have been borrowed from the practices used for pregnant women, and, as such, should be considered secondary.

The analogies discussed here are not related to prohibitions concering the isolation of a woman during the gestation and postpartum periods. Those stem from a deeply-rooted cultural belief in a relationship between the woman and the devil. It seems that in folk tradition and culture the relationship between a cow and the devil does not exist.

The mapping of the practices connected with human pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period onto the cow reveals the importance of the latter for country dwellers in earlier times. There are also numerous analogies between a new-born baby and a bovine offspring. Therefore, there seems to be cultural equivalence between a pregnant woman and a cow in calf.

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