



Original Article

UKRAINIAN SYMBOLS IN UKRAINIAN CANADIAN WEDDINGS*

Sogu Hong^a

^a *Professor, Department of Ukrainian Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea, soguhong@hufs.ac.kr*

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on symbols as well as on the ritual process by which Ukrainian Canadians absorb, modify, and transmit folk expressions in their wedding rituals. This study discusses why and how Ukrainian descendants attempt to incorporate Ukrainian symbols in their wedding rituals. It also introduces three types of symbols, explaining where Ukrainian descendants learn Ukrainian symbols and how they create new forms of tradition. Through this study, we can learn Ukrainian ethnic symbols, which are usually highly visible and clear in meaning, are not fixed points of tradition, but rather are frames of reference and meaning to which peoples respond to changes in social environment and conditions surrounding them.

Keywords: *Ukrainian symbols, Ukrainian weddings, Ukrainian Canadians, ethnicity, ritual*

I. INTRODUCTION

Myerhoff (1992) provided a typical definition: “Ritual is an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion” (129). Rituals are performed as one way to convey information to members of a community, marking occasions of some significance. Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) explained that a symbol can be grouped together with other symbols and understood as part of a larger whole: a social code. Just as symbols combine into social codes, social codes also combine to form a larger unit, a culture. That is, all symbols, for example, relying on material cultures as their vehicle to convey meaning are part of the same large set or social code.

* This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2022.

This study focuses on symbols as well as on the ritual process by which Ukrainian descendants absorb, modify, and transmit folk expressions in wedding rituals. Interaction with members of one's own ethnic group, and response to the cultural values of other groups, lead to the evolution of symbols and strategies that in turn draw on varied cultural resources. This study also pays attention to cultural scenes in which Ukrainian descendants adapt traditional folklore genres to new settings or invent new forms for strategic incorporation into traditional culture. This creative flexibility in many forms of cultural expression would suggest that ethnicity is a dynamic and evolving force in Ukrainian Canadian life rather than a conservative grouping of old and outmoded ways (Stern and Cicala, 1991, p. xi).

This study consists of three parts. The first part discusses the reasons that Ukrainian descendants attempt to incorporate Ukrainian symbols in their wedding rituals. It also discusses the reason and the way that those symbols and elements are chosen. The second part of this study discusses about the sources of symbols, explaining where Ukrainian descendants learn Ukrainian symbols and how they create new forms of tradition. The third part introduces three different types of Ukrainian symbols in which the bride and groom as well as their families or communities express their ethnic identification.

Through this study, we attempt to understand the cultural context in which Ukrainian Canadians adapt traditional symbols to new settings or invent new forms for strategic incorporation into their culture. This creative flexibility suggests that ethnicity can be a dynamic and evolving force in Ukrainian Canadian life rather than a conservative grouping of old and outmoded practices.

II. REASONS FOR INCORPORATING UKRAINIAN SYMBOLS

People can express their ethnic identification through ethnic symbols for many reasons. According to Gans (1979), a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or to that of the old country, and love for and pride in a tradition can be major reasons for using ethnic symbols (pp. 204-205):

The feelings can be directed at a generalized tradition, or at specific ones; a desire for the cohesive extended immigrant family, or the obedience of children to parental authority or the unambiguous orthodoxy of immigrant religion. . . . People may even sincerely desire to 'return' to these imagined pasts, which are conveniently cleansed of the complexities that accompanied them in the real past, but while they may soon realize that they cannot go back, they may not surrender the wish. Or else they displace that wish on churches, schools, and the mass media, asking them to recreate a tradition, or rather, to create a symbolic tradition, even while their familial, occupational, religious, and political lives are pragmatic response to the imperatives of their roles and positions in local and national hierarchical social structure (Gans, 1979, pp. 204-205).

Based on the responses I obtained in interviews¹, I propose four reasons why my informants expressed themselves through ethnic symbols.

2.1 Being proud of one's ethnic heritage and past

As Gans (1979) stated, children of immigrants may feel a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of their parents or grandparents and feel love for and pride in the old tradition of the ancestral homeland (p. 204). Without such pride, the desire to perpetuate tradition rapidly diminishes (Driedger, 1989, p. 146). Many of my informants who have belonged to cultural organizations explained that membership in them was a very natural way to express their ethnic identification through ethnic symbols as a way of respecting their heritage and culture.

For example, Michael Komylo's activity in Ukrainian organizations started right from *sadochok* (kindergarten). He was an altar boy in a Ukrainian church and sang in Ukrainian children's choirs. Later on, he served on the executive of the Ukrainian Catholic Youth Organization at both the parish and national levels. He has also been in a *bandurist*² group in Saskatoon. He said, "It wasn't really forced, I guess they [his parents] just wanted [me] to continue learning language and culture, I just did it . . . sometimes I didn't want to go dancing, but... in adult life I start to realize that I really want to obtain that and keep the culture" (Interview 4).

Michael and his wife, Gena, did not have any official engagement ceremony. However, they posed for a special black and white photograph a few days before their wedding. In the picture, Gena and Michael are in traditional Ukrainian shirts, and Michael holds a traditional instrument, a *bandura*. When asked why he wore a traditional costume and held a *bandura*, Michael said, "It's just being a little bit proud of it. I don't know . . . to me it is just natural to do it that way" (Interview 4).

2.2 Respecting one's family

One of the main reasons why my informants incorporated Ukrainian symbols into their weddings was to respect their (grand) parents and family, even though my informants themselves might not have thought that these symbols were important.

For example, Karen and Grant married on Valentine's Day in 2001. They won a prize from a radio station and had all wedding costs paid for them on the condition that they would get married on Feb. 14, 2001. The radio station provided all wedding materials from the wedding dress to the wedding hall, which was a Western-style bar. Grant's *baba* (grandmother) was very upset when

¹ The 10 interviews presented in this study are part of the interview material of my doctoral dissertation, "Ukrainian Canadian Weddings as Expressions of Ethnic Identity: Contemporary Edmonton Traditions" University of Alberta (2005). Also, it should be noted that this article is a revised and supplemented portion of my unpublished doctoral dissertation.

² *Bandurist* (Ukrainian: бандурист) is a person who plays the Ukrainian string instrument known as the bandura.

she was told that Karen and Grant were going to marry in a bar. She said, “What do you mean, you marry in a bar?” (Interview 7). She could not understand and was disappointed because she always wanted them to marry in a church. As a result, Karen tried to satisfy Grant’s grandmother, putting more Ukrainian elements into their wedding: “Personally myself, I think I was more conscious of the Ukrainian elements to put into it because of her. My *baba* (grandmother) was like whatever, where you want to get married, you can get married, it is always good, you know. Here, his *baba* is more traditional than mine. So I didn’t do things for myself, but I thought about her a lot ... We wanted our family to be proud of the event. So *baba* was really in my head a lot... So if she liked it, in my mind everybody will also like it” (Interview 7).

2.3 Representing individual identity

To represent who they are as individuals, the bride and/or the groom can use Ukrainian symbols and elements. Eileen, who had been a member of a Ukrainian dance group for years, was expecting her dance group “*Dunai*” to perform at her wedding and cried when this group did so. Many people at her wedding did not know about her dance group. Thus, Eileen believed that these people could understand her better by watching the group dance. It made her feel proud of herself: “The pride ... all my *babas* and *didos* (grandfathers), I knew that they would like that part. . . having my dance group there... Not everybody knows all aspects of the person’s life. Because my close friends and families were at our wedding, I shared a piece of me that they may have not known about. That was my Ukrainian dancing. And that was a good feeling” (Interview 9).

2.4 Providing variety and amusement for the guests

Some of my informants paid attention to the social function of the wedding rituals. They believed that they had to entertain their guests as well as they could. Adding ethnic elements into the wedding was a way of providing more variety for the guests.

Richard and Sunea, who have Ukrainian and Korean ancestry respectively, planned to have Ukrainian and Korean dance performances because they would be interesting and meaningful for guests. Richard said, “Like the reception part, it wasn’t for us at all, I wanted our guests to have an interesting thing which was never seen before. Ukrainians have never seen Korean dance and Korean traditional culture and the same thing with the Koreans. They’ve never seen Ukrainian dance unless they saw *Shumka* dance. So I wanted to do that and we had such a good response after the wedding. Everybody was so amazed at what we did.” (Interview 2)

2.5 Limitations

Ukrainian symbols are not always welcomed and used as an expression of ethnicity. In some cases, for certain reasons, people do not want to use certain symbols. Firstly, people often give up a symbol that they regard as meaningless. For example, a Ukrainian Canadian woman married a man of French ancestry. She had a relatively traditional Ukrainian wedding, incorporating several Ukrainian traditions and elements. However, she did not have *vinkopletennia* (wreath-

making). Her mother said it would not be practical because a traditional *vinkopletennia* would be performed the day before the wedding. Also, her mother thought it might be “too much” for those who did not know Ukrainian songs. Including a traditional *vinkopletennia* in the wedding would have been nice, but her mother and she thought it was a meaningless ritual and too time-consuming (Cherwick, 1990, p. 35).

Secondly, if a Ukrainian symbol conflicts with a Canadian or any other symbol, the symbol is sometimes avoided or changed in form. The Ukrainian ritual of blessing the bride and groom prior to the ceremony is included in some Canadian weddings. This ritual blessing by the parents of the bride and groom conflicts in part with the Canadian tradition of the bride and groom not seeing each other before the ceremony. Depending on how much the Ukrainian tradition is valued in comparison with the Canadian tradition, the couple must choose whether or not to perform this ritual blessing. Those who do not much value the blessing tradition follow the Canadian tradition. Others try to change its form in order to follow both the Ukrainian and Canadian traditions. Markiana and Yuriy had two separate blessings before their wedding. Since Markiana was aware of the Canadian custom about “not seeing each other,” she decided to have two blessings (Interview 10).

In the late evening of the night before the wedding day, Markiana’s parents blessed her and Yuriy together. This blessing was a kind of practice for the blessing the next day. However, all of them performed the ritual as seriously as they did at the real blessing. Then next day, the groom and his party visited his parent-in-laws’ house to present wedding bread. This time, Markiana’s parents blessed Yuriy first with icons and after Yuriy left for the church, blessed Markiana. Thus, Markiana did not see Yuriy until their marriage service at the church.

Thirdly, if Ukrainian symbols are too expensive, people avoid them or limit their numbers. For example, even though Ukrainian foods are very popular symbols at Ukrainian Canadian weddings, many couples limit the number of Ukrainian foods on the menu for economic reasons. Another kind of symbol at many Ukrainian Canadian weddings is an open bar. However, it is also subject to the wedding host’s financial ability.

Fourthly, if a symbol does not match with the aesthetic values or tastes of contemporary Ukrainian Canadians, the symbol is not included. The white wedding dress has become a predominant choice for the most Ukrainian Canadian brides. Thus, nowadays, the bride very rarely wears traditional wedding attire at the marriage ceremony, not because the traditional wedding attire is not beautiful, but because the aesthetic values of people have changed. People prefer a white wedding dress. Some brides add a Ukrainian feature to the traditional Canadian wedding attire, by wearing a bridal headpiece in the shape of *vinok* or wreath. However, others choose not to wear a headpiece at all.

Thus, a wide range of considerations affects the decision whether to incorporate or not to incorporate ethnic symbols into a wedding.

III. SOURCES OF UKRAINIAN SYMBOLS

Ukrainian Canadians learn about Ukrainian symbols from a variety of sources. Those symbols are also classified into several types. Driedger (1989) proposed a typology of criteria and principles to measure ethnic identify retention. He distinguished six factors of ethnic identification: identification with a territory, ethnic institutions, ethnic culture, historical symbols, ideology and charismatic leadership (pp. 143-148). His typology provides this study with a good basis for classifying the sources and types of ethnic symbols. His first four factors plus several others are adapted for my own purposes here.

3.1 Family traditions

Rituals provide a vehicle for the “transmission of family culture across generations” (Troll, 1988, p. 628). One of the popular sources for obtaining Ukrainian symbols or elements is family tradition. In many cases, my informants responded that they did not know when a family tradition started and where it was from, but they believed that it was a Ukrainian tradition because their families or friends had included it in their wedding.

Greg and Luba, who married in 1989, had a ritual in which four family members presented five objects to wish them the best of luck in their wedding: “We give you gold so that your married life will glitter as it does and that together you will be wealthy and live in affluence. We give you garlic so that you are as healthy as it is and to protect you from all evil. We give you honey so that your married life may be as sweet as it is, and especially that you stick to each other in happiness and sorrow. And lastly we give you the most important gift of all - we give you a small piece of bread and an ear of wheat and rye with the wish that your family live and be fruitful in the embraces of life and prosperity” (Interview 8).

Mark, who is a relative of Luba, also received a presentation of five elements at his wedding. However, his case elements were gold, earth, honey, wheat, and salt. Mark assumed that such a toast is a Ukrainian tradition because his family usually performed it at its weddings. Considering that this ritual was performed during a speech and toast at the reception hall, we may relate this ritual to an old Ukrainian wedding tradition, *perepii*³. In the past, when *perepii* took place, the couple first approached each guest to offer a drink while the guest, in the turn, gave the couple a gift. While *perepii* was progressing, the wedding chorus sang songs such as,

³ In Ukraine *perepii* was a gift-giving ceremony in the post-wedding party (Vovk, 1995, p. 311; as cited in Maruschak, 1985, p. 168). The couple approached each guest to offer a drink and the guest, in turn, gave the couple a gift while drinking a toast to the couple’s health (Roshkevych, 1970, p. 119). In Canada, *perepii* tends to involve offering a drink and toast while *darovannia* is for a gift-giving rite.

Oi rode, rode bahatyi,	Oh Clan, rich clan,
Perepyvai towarets' rohatyi,	As you drink, present horned cattle,
A vy, sestrytsi, telytsi,	And you, sisters, present heifers,
A vy, zovytsi, iahnytsi,	And you, sisters-in-law, present lambs,
A vy, kumochky, kurochky,	And you, godmothers, present chickens,
A vy, perepiitsi, po kopiitsi	And you, guests, give a coin.

(Verkhovynets, 1970, p. 267; as cited in Maruschak, 1985, p. 168)

Replacing cattle, heifers, and chickens with gold, wheat, bread, and salt, Ukrainian Canadians can adapt and stylize the old ritual in a new setting.

As mentioned, the later generations of Ukrainian Canadians tend to create Ukrainian symbols through personalized interpretations. Eileen (Interview 9) regarded it as a tradition for the father of the bride to give her a ride to the church because in all her family, the fathers had always done so. Some ethnographic materials emphasize the role of the bride's father and mother in blessing the couples and their entourage before the wedding procession begins. However, the parents' role was not emphasized in the traditional Ukrainian wedding procession involving the bride and groom, the *druzhyky* (bridesmaid) and *boiary* (groomsmen), and musicians. Indeed, the parents often did not go to the church but waited for the guests to come to the parents' homes.

3.2 Friends' tradition

The bride or groom's friends often play an important role in introducing some traditions. One of Irene's friends brought a loaf of bread on top of which a knife had been inserted as well as *barvinok* branches to make *vinky* (Interview 3). Hnatiuk (1985) explained that during the *vinkopletennia*, the *svakhy* (female matchmakers) spread the periwinkle on the table and place a loaf of bread, with a padlock and knife attached, into the sieve (p. 225). Irene could not remember the meaning of bread, but she recalled that she had attended an unexpected gathering, planned by her friend, to make wedding wreaths. Gena also had a *vinkopletennia* where her family and friends made *vinky* (wreathes). At the end of the ritual, one of Gena's friends suggested that Gena should sell the wreath to the groom. Gena explained, "That [*vinkopletennia*] was a little bit of her custom blended in with ours" (Interview 4).

The bride and groom make their choices in light of what others have previously chosen to do, and the friends and family members who are their guests evaluate the appropriateness of their choices based on similar (and overlapping) prior knowledge. Eileen reflected that she learned something from her friends' wedding in Edmonton and incorporated what she had learned into her wedding on the farm: "This is what I incorporated into the wedding. By going to a lot of my friends' weddings in Edmonton, who were second-generation or first-generation Ukrainian Canadian, I picked up few things, like meeting at the entrance with parents and having a shot of liquor. Then my mom and dad said, "Ya, we remember that people used to do it long time ago. Same with the donation line, you know I went to my dancing teacher [']s wedding] when she got married. I went to her wedding that had that [*darovannia* (presentation of gifts)]. I liked that

tradition. . . . My mom and dad forgot many things, though decorating the gate was my dad's idea" (Interview 9).

3.3 Ethnic institutions / Knowledge banks

Edmonton has the largest population of Ukrainian single- and multiple-origin residents in Canada. The Ukrainian community in Edmonton consciously seeks to preserve its heritage and culture by sponsoring lectures, funding chairs at the University of Alberta, establishing scholarships in ethnic studies, collecting art and artifacts, maintaining museums, and so on. Numerous Ukrainian dance groups, Plast (scout), SUM (Ukrainian Youth Association), Ukrainian bilingual schools and programs, Ukrainian museums and archives, and Ukrainian community centres are very important sources that Ukrainian Canadians can learn about their tradition. Bakalian (1993) called these depositories for heritage conservation "knowledge banks" (p. 45). Ukrainian institutions, including educational institutions, cultural organizations, and museums, provide a knowledge bank that can be a source of Ukrainian symbols.

Some of my informants researched Ukrainian wedding traditions in books or by attending lectures at the university and incorporated these Ukrainian elements into their wedding. Gena took several lectures related to Ukrainian folklore at the University of Alberta. She learned about traditional wedding attendants, including *starosty* (matchmakers) (Interview 4). Even though she had not used matchmakers, she decided to have *starosty* at her wedding for a symbolic as well as a functional reason. Michael and Gena asked their very close friends, Volodymyr and Orysia, to be *starosty* for their wedding. Shortly before it, Volodymyr and Orysia, had had a newborn baby and had asked Gena and Michael to be its godparents. At the wedding, the *starosty* were in charge of leading some rituals, such as the *vinkopletennia* and blessing (Interview 4).

In order to have a traditional, but a unique design on her invitation card, Irene tried to find appropriate designs from various Ukrainian books. She finally found a design in which a couple in Ukrainian dress stands facing each other (Interview 3).

When Markiana was a high school student, she completed an assignment to compile an information package about Ukrainian wedding traditions (Interview 10). While she visited Ukraine, she researched and observed many wedding traditions and made notes in book form. When she was married, the material from the school assignment turned out to be very useful for planning her own wedding.

Objects may link their owners to the Ukrainian culture through the allusions and memories that these objects evoke. Many of the items received as wedding gifts came from Ukrainian friends, and thus, the choice of friends from the same ethnic group is emphasized through the acquisition of objects and the reminiscences of the donors. Other objects (fridge magnets and figurines presenting Ukrainian dancers) are associated with the owner's participation in Ukrainian dance groups and are evidence of affiliation with ethnic organizations.

Among my informants, those who belonged to Ukrainian cultural organizations usually maintained a special bond with other group members and often organized traditional gatherings with them. For example, the *Shumka* dance group has a special tradition for female members who marry. Group members host a bridal shower or a *divych vechir* (Maiden's evening) several weeks

or months before the wedding. On this occasion, close female friends of the bride present her a group gift, usually a painting or craft with a Ukrainian theme. The present is usually displayed at the bride's house after the wedding, not only providing her with memories of the group members, but also making her proud of her affiliation with the organization.

Eileen had danced in the *Verkhovyna* ensemble for 18 years: "I have danced a very long time and I am very proud of it. Maybe that's the part of . . . why I am so proud of my culture" (Interview 9). Around thirty dancers who had used to dance with her had been regularly meeting with each other for years. She had special feeling about the girls who had danced together in the big city: "We all came from the same background. When we got together and talked... the girls that I have danced with... we have gone from... high school to University. . . to meeting future husband, to getting married, to having dated Now we discuss our kids.... I probably believe that when we are seventy-five years old, we will still meet. It's a bond . . . I just found that people who are Ukrainian, we understand each other" (Interview 9).

At her wedding reception, her dance group performed a special dance and then presented a gift to Eileen and Lawrence, which was a figurine showing a man putting a wedding ring in his bride's hand. Eileen displays this figurine in her bedroom. That gift was not an explicitly Ukrainian piece, but it always reminds Eileen of her past with her Ukrainian friends in the dance group. The group's dance performance and its gift were two elements that made her wedding "Ukrainian" (Interview 9).

IV. TYPES OF SYMBOLS

Ukrainian symbols that Ukrainian Canadians learn from the above-mentioned sources can be divided into several types.

4.1 Heritage symbols

Driedger stated that heritage symbols create a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of continuing tradition that is important and worth perpetuating (p. 146). Knowledge of origins and pride in heritage are thought to be particularly significant for ethnic urbanites (p. 145). Based on Driedger's typology, Kuraničeva (2003) emphasized that certain art objects displayed in the Ukrainian Canadian home are perceived as symbolic of the Ukrainian cultural heritage: icons, embroidered towels, representations of poppies, sheep, wheat and others (pp. 117-118). These are the same symbols that many of my informants used in their weddings.

Most of my informants who thought their wedding had been "traditional" or "Ukrainian" had prepared in advance several heritage symbols for their weddings. In these cases, *korovai* (Ukrainian wedding cake), *rushnyky* (embroidered ceremonial towels), icons, and *vinky* (wreaths) were believed to be prerequisites for a Ukrainian wedding.

Symbols of cultural heritage such as *korovai*, *rushnyky*, and *vinky* were related to complicated rituals in the past. However, these rituals or traditions have changed or been eliminated. The preparation of the *korovai*, for example, used to have great significance. In one description, for

example, the women gathered to make the bread with the following special ingredients: grain that was seven years old, water from three wells, seven groups of sixty eggs, and a gallon of yeast (Chubinskii, 1875, p. 22). This complicated method of making *korovai* is not practiced any more, and the whole ritual has become much more simple. In the current context of Canada, the ritual of making *korovai* as well as *rushnyky* and *vinky* has been changed in terms of the reason for making them, the persons who make them, the time of making them, the place where they are made, the way they are made, and the purpose of having them.⁴

According to Gans (1979), ethnic symbols are frequently individual cultural practices that are taken from an older ethnic culture; they are 'abstracted' from that culture and pulled out of its original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it. Instead of "being ethnic," later-generation descendants manifest their ethnicity through personalized interpretations and "varying mental constructions of ethnic behavior" (di Leonardo, 1984, p. 228).

For example, Ukrainian Canadians make Ukrainian symbols through personalized interpretations of Ukrainian color themes. Grant, who used to be an active member in a dance group, thought "orange and yellow" were the traditional colors of the Transcarpathian region, so he wore an embroidered shirt with orange and yellow colors (Interview 7).

On the contrary, Tetyana, who came from the Transcarpathian region, tried not to use orange and yellow because they symbolize bad luck to her: "Something orange and yellow in your wedding is not good. It means apart. The couple will fall apart. So I tried to have nothing yellow, nothing orange" (Interview 6).

As Gans (1979) correctly pointed out, all the cultural patterns that are transformed into symbols are themselves guided by a common pragmatic imperative: they are visible and clear in meaning to a large number of second- or third-generation ethnics, and they are easily expressed and felt without unduly interfering with other aspects of life (p. 205).

Besides *korovai*, *rushnyky*, and *vinky*, wheat and *barvinok* (periwinkle) are often used as Ukrainian symbols. While *barvinok* is used for decorating both *korovai* and the headtable, wheat is very popular for the hall decorations, bouquets, corsages, the design of the invitation card, and in other contexts.

Ukrainian heritage symbols are often reproduced today in artistic works by crafts people or artists. When a prominent ethnic artist makes an object, people associate ethnic meaning and pride with owning it. Lorraine and Wayne (Interview 1) believe that the bride and groom should not purchase icons. They should be presented by others. Thus, Lorraine's parents purchased the icons, which an artist in Manitoba had made. When Wayne went to Manitoba, he contacted the artist and ordered two icons for his wedding. Then Lorraine's parents paid for them and presented them to the couple after the blessing a day before their wedding. Currently, those icons are displayed in their living room. (Interview 1)

⁴ For more detailed examples, please see the following resource: Hong, 2005, pp. 66-112, pp. 133-160.

4.2 National symbols

The word “national” has several meanings: (1) “having to do with a nation or country; (2) characteristic of or peculiar to the people of a nation; and (3) concerned with or applicable to or belonging to an entire nation or country. If “nation” is taken to refer to the Ukrainian State, Ukrainian Canadians cannot claim that they are the people of the Ukrainian nation. However, some Ukrainian Canadians have a need for representative, authentic and instantly recognizable symbols. They create “national symbols,” which are largely based on “certain aspects of the Ukrainian folk heritage” (Klymasz, 1972, p. 8) and unconsciously or consciously use those symbols to preserve and foster their heritage in Canada. One of characteristics of “national symbols” is that ordinary objects of the past become raised to the level of national folk art. For example, when the Easter egg is regarded as an ethnic icon, representing all of Ukrainian culture, it is transformed from a heritage symbols into a national symbol.

Pohorecky (1984) claimed “all ethnic symbols have cultural and political aspects” (p. 129). He discussed selected symbols that reflect political aspects, with emphasis on the first three waves of Ukrainian immigrants who came to Canada. He said that a renewed revival of the pioneer era and “heritage symbols” remains politically vital for developing Ukrainian culture in Canada (p. 140).

4.3 Symbols related to the identification with ancestors’ homeland or a territory

Ukrainian Canadians who do not live in Ukraine often connect their ethnic identity to their ancestors’ homeland, Ukraine. Kuranicheva (2003) argued that the territory that Ukrainian Canadians connect to their ethnic identity is Ukraine. Her interviewees regarded a number of items as “special” because they reminded them of Ukraine, the actual or ancestral motherland. Several of my informants also mentioned that the use of objects from Ukraine definitely gave their weddings a special meaning. Michael and Gena obtained their engagement rings from Ukraine. Michael asked his friend to purchase two rings from Ukraine, one for Gena and one for himself. Then he included them in his marriage proposal to her. Michael said, “Why did I have this one? We talked one time [that when] we do get married we would like to have two rings, one from Ukraine. . . as well as another ring [from here, which is] also again more a Western type of ring. So we had two rings. Both rings were used in the wedding ceremony as well” (Interview 4).

According to Driedger (1989), “Territory is an essential ingredient of any definition of a community. Individuals can identify with a territory, and it is the place within which ethnic activity can take place” (p. 144). Lieberman (1970) also argued that the maintenance of an ethnic language and culture is not possible unless a sufficiently large number of people of the same ethnic group are concentrated in a territory. Ethnic bloc settlements are common in western Canada, including the Ukrainian Canadians in the Aspen Belt stretching from the Manitoba Inter-Lake region to Edmonton. Even though many Ukrainian Canadians moved out of the bloc settlement into bigger cities, significant Ukrainian populations are still living in the rural bloc settlements. Those who used to live in the bloc settlements, or as well as the children of these people, tend to connect their ethnic identity to the territory where they or their parents came from.

Grant and Karen were an example. They decided to use wheat in various ways to include a Ukrainian element in their wedding. Karen put wheat in her and the ladies' bouquets and corsages while her friend used wheat to decorate the "wishing well" on the guest registry table (Interview 7). Grant and Karen also wanted wheat as a main symbol for their invitation card even though they had to choose it from templates. They said that wheat had double meaning for them. Grant believed that wheat is a Ukrainian [heritage] symbol because it is very popular everywhere in Ukrainian life (Interview 7). For Karen, wheat had another special meaning. It always reminded her of her grandparents, who were farmers in Alberta. Thus, wheat reminded her not only of her Ukrainian heritage but also of her Alberta heritage and her family.

Others have argued that Ukrainian Canadians may not be a "diaspora" any more, for many have "re-located" their homeland to Canada. According to Shostak (2003), local [Mundane] Ukrainians developed their own version of Ukrainianness. Thus, recent immigrants from Ukraine have experienced the local Ukrainianness as different than anything they experienced in their homeland (p. 82). When Karen connected wheat with her grandparents' farm in Alberta, she might have been identifying with an ethnic homeland territory.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, a ritual was viewed as an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion. I focused on one of the important functions of rituals, which is to provide a vehicle for conveying identity. Including ethnic symbols in their wedding and performing wedding rituals in public, Ukrainian Canadians can tell their own story of identity about whom they have come from, who they are now, and who they wish to be in the future. Through the design of particular combinations of cultural identities in a wedding ritual, Ukrainian Canadians can not only display their intentions but also make them true.

For the interviewees for this study, the use of Ukrainian symbols was most frequent at the reception (39%). Those interviewees who were married in a Ukrainian church also tended to demonstrate a high intensity of Ukrainian symbols during the marriage ceremony (37%). The use of Ukrainian symbols was less frequent in marriage ceremonies outside Ukrainian churches (0.02%), as well as generally in the pre-wedding (16%) and the post-wedding activities (24%) (Hong, 2005, p. 267).

Ukrainian Canadians use Ukrainian symbols for a variety of reasons, and there are numerous sources from which to learn about these symbols. This study shows that ethnic symbols, which are usually highly visible and clear in meaning, are not fixed points of tradition, but rather are frames of reference and meaning to which peoples respond to changes in social environment and conditions surrounding them. In addition, this study shows that ethnic symbols are not simply static products of Ukrainian Canadian culture. Rather, they are responses or solutions to the various situations that characterize, project, and parody everyday life. Ukrainian Canadians use ethnic symbols as a means of expressing themselves and as a way to bring the real world and the

ideal world closer together. Through these symbols, Ukrainian Canadians define their ethnic identity in relation to their ethnic past and present.

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2. Corry, Richard and Sunea. Recorded interview by Sogu Hong. Calgary. Mar. 21, 2003.
3. Kolomijchuk, Jerry and Irene. Recorded interview by Sogu Hong. Edmonton. July 7, 2003.
4. Komylo, Michael and Gena. Recorded interview by Sogu Hong. Edmonton. May 21, 2003.
5. Lee, Angela and Insu. (Pseudonym) Recorded interview by Sogu Hong. Vancouver. May 25, 2003.
6. Mackey, Steven and Tatyana. Recorded interview by Sogu Hong. Edmonton. Nov. 18, 2003.
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Received November 18, 2022; Reviewed November 30, 2022; Accepted December 15, 2022