

Article

Post-Liturgical Women's Rituals Among Western Ukrainian Female Labor Migrants in Israel

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Abstract

This article develops the analytical concept of post-liturgical female rituality to examine informal religious practices created by Western Ukrainian female labor migrants in Israel. Drawing on approaches that conceptualize ritual as flexible, embodied, and processual, it focuses on women's ritual activities that take place in close temporal and symbolic proximity to official church liturgy while remaining outside canonical frameworks. Rather than directly challenging institutional religion, these practices extend and reinterpret patriarchal liturgy through gendered forms of ritual engagement. The analysis is based on qualitative research among Ukrainian Greek Catholic women in Israel, including 27 in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography. The findings highlight three interconnected dimensions: collective gatherings following church services; post-liturgical practices involving food, singing, and embodied performance; and national-religious rituals expressing emotional belonging to Ukraine in the context of war. The article argues that post-liturgical female rituals constitute a distinct form of women's religious agency that operates within institutional Christianity while reworking its meanings, contributing to feminist scholarship on ritual, migration, and war.

Keywords: post-liturgical rituality; women rituals; Ukrainian Greek Catholic church; female labor migrants; Russian invasion of Ukraine; migration; lived religion; bottom of form

1. Introduction

Scholarship on women and ritual has long emphasized women's marginal position within institutional religious frameworks, alongside their creative engagement with religious life through informal, embodied, and non-canonical practices. Feminist studies have shown that women frequently sustain religious meaning through everyday ritual labor enacted in domestic and relational settings, where care, sociality, and bodily practice become central modes of religious expression (Avishai 2008; Sered 1992; Stadler 2015). Contemporary ritual theory has further expanded the analytical vocabulary for understanding such practices by conceptualizing ritual not as a fixed category but as a flexible and strategic mode of action. Bell's (1997) notion of ritualization and Grimes's (2014) emphasis on ritual as process, adaptation, and invention provide key conceptual tools for analyzing how ritual meaning emerges through practice rather than through formal scripts alone.

Within this body of scholarship, Berry (2006) offers a particularly important bridging perspective by examining women's informal practices of ritualizing as strategies for marking life transitions that remain socially invisible or institutionally unrecognized. Rather than locating women's ritual creativity either fully within or fully outside religious traditions, Berry highlights the ambiguous threshold spaces in which women draw on inherited



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religious vocabularies while reworking them through vernacular, embodied, and relational forms. This perspective is especially relevant for contexts of migration and lived religion, where women's ritual practices often sustain continuity, belonging, and emotional endurance under conditions of displacement and constraint.

Building on these strands of scholarship, this article examines informal religious practices among Western Ukrainian Greek Catholic female labor migrants in Israel. It focuses on women's ritual activities that take place in close temporal and symbolic proximity to official church services, yet unfold outside canonical liturgical frameworks. The article proposes the analytical concept of post-liturgical female rituality to capture these practices as a distinct mode of gendered religious engagement. Rather than challenging institutional religion directly, post-liturgical rituals function as informal extensions of official liturgy through which women sustain religious meaning, women-centered community, and Ukrainian national belonging in everyday life under conditions of migration and war.

Drawing on qualitative research based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography, the article analyzes three interrelated dimensions of post-liturgical female rituality: women's collective gatherings following church services; post-liturgical practices involving food, singing, and embodied performance; and national-religious rituals through which women express care, grief, and hope for Ukraine during wartime. By foregrounding women's post-liturgical practices, the article contributes to feminist scholarship on ritual, migration, and religion by conceptualizing how women extend, reinterpret, and sustain religious and national meaning through informal, embodied practices in contexts of migration and war.

2. Historical Background of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Suppression, Continuity, and Revival

Religious life in Ukraine has been profoundly shaped by political rupture, including Soviet-era repression, post-1991 religious revival, and the renewed politicization of faith following Russia's invasion. Western Ukraine remains the most religiously observant region, while religiosity in other parts of the country often functions more as a marker of cultural belonging than of regular institutional practice (Kuryliak 2022; Razumkov Centre 2021). In all parts of the country, women tend to report higher levels of religious identification and more frequently describe religion as a source of moral strength and emotional support.

Ukraine's Christian landscape includes multiple competing Orthodox and Greek Catholic jurisdictions. While the Ukrainian Orthodox Church historically linked to the Moscow Patriarchate held broad influence for decades, its legitimacy has sharply declined since 2022. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which follows the Byzantine rite while remaining in communion with Rome, has long been especially prominent in Western Ukraine and remains closely associated with regional religious and national identity (Kuryliak 2022).

Under Soviet rule, the UGCC was forcibly liquidated and driven underground, with clergy arrested, exiled, or executed. Despite severe repression, religious life persisted through clandestine liturgies, secret ordinations, and informal devotional practices (Bociurkiw 1996). In Western Ukraine, this underground continuity became deeply intertwined with national identity and resistance, rendering the UGCC a symbol of both spiritual endurance and cultural survival.

Following independence in 1991, debates over the relationship between religion, nation, and state intensified in Ukraine. Questions of ecclesiastical authority and church jurisdiction became increasingly politicized, particularly during periods of political upheaval and geopolitical conflict. In the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, Euromaidan,

and Russia's war in Donbas, ecclesiastical independence came to be framed not merely as a religious matter but as part of broader struggles over sovereignty, diplomatic alignment, and national self-determination. In this context, the pursuit of a nationally recognized Ukrainian church became intertwined with competing geopolitical projects, as religious diplomacy and church-state relations were mobilized in the wider conflict with Russia (Leustean and Samokhvalov 2019).

At the same time, the UGCC cannot be understood solely through its role within Ukraine's domestic religious and political landscape. The church has also been shaped by long histories of emigration and transnational community formation. Its diasporic orientation further reinforces the entanglement of religion, migration, and national belonging. Often described as a "Church of migrants," the UGCC has developed transnational pastoral networks and community support structures in response to labor migration and displacement (Babynskyi 2025; Strielkowski et al. 2016).

This historical trajectory provides essential context for understanding how religion among temporary female labor migrants from Western Ukraine in Israel functions as a space of continuity, belonging, and moral anchoring. It also highlights how religious life has been shaped by repression, renewed after independence, and intensified under conditions of war.

3. Migration and the Greek Catholic Church in Israel

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic insecurity and unemployment pushed large numbers of Ukrainians to seek work abroad, particularly in Russia and European destinations such as Poland and Italy. In many households, remittances became essential for sustaining living standards (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016). Over time, these migration patterns became increasingly gendered, with women from Western Ukraine disproportionately employed in caregiving and domestic labor. While such trajectories are often framed through conventional expectations of women as family caregivers, they also repositioned many women as primary earners and key decision-makers within transnational households, subtly reshaping gender relations (Tolstokorova 2009).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 produced mass displacement on a global scale, with nearly six million Ukrainians forced to flee by 2025. Although Israel restricts non-Jewish immigration, approximately 15,000 Ukrainian refugees entered the country, and by 2023 around 35,000 Ukrainians were living in Israel, including roughly 20,000 labor migrants, most of them women employed in eldercare and cleaning (HIAS 2023). This article focuses on long-term female labor migrants, many of whom arrived prior to the war and continue to navigate work routines, religious life, and the emotional and moral consequences of the conflict.

Israel's ethno-national migration regime produces differentiated forms of exclusion for non-Jewish temporary labor migrants. While the institutionalization of labor migration enables the state to recruit foreign workers for low-skilled jobs, it excludes them from basic social protections, exposing them to exploitation within a neoliberal framework and to ongoing regimes of control and deportability (Raijman and Kemp 2016). The wars in Ukraine and Israel further intensify the vulnerability, uncertainty, and pressures shaping the lives of Ukrainian female labor migrants in Israel. In this context, the Jaffa parish offers women not only religious services but also a crucial source of stability and support in coping with precarious work conditions, restrictive migration policies, and wartime uncertainty.

Its congregations are largely composed of unaccompanied women from Western Ukraine who work in eldercare and cleaning. The UGCC established its first presence in Haifa in 2011 and later opened a second congregation in Jaffa in 2012. Today, UGCC communities operate in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Netanya, and Ashdod. Since 2016, the Jaffa

parish has been led by priest Patryk, and services are conducted in Ukrainian on Saturdays and Sundays in order to accommodate women's work schedules. Attendance typically ranges from several dozen worshippers to more than one hundred. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic community rents a space within an Arab Catholic church building in Jaffa, known among Ukrainian parishioners as the Church of the Annunciation. Regular services are held there on Saturdays and Sundays, while major festive liturgies are sometimes conducted at the nearby St. Peter's Church in Jaffa.

Religious life extends beyond the liturgy itself. The church provides confessions and pastoral support, and it regularly organizes pilgrimages to Christian holy sites across Israel. Major holidays attract several hundred women, many of whom wear traditional vyshyvanky. Easter celebrations include the blessing of food baskets, while Christmas is marked by the performance of kolyadky, reinforcing cultural continuity and national pride. Donations collected during services support both church expenses and charitable initiatives, including assistance to Ukrainian volunteers and wartime needs. Visiting priests further sustain transnational religious connections.

The broader composition of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Jaffa extends beyond the group of female labor migrants who constitute the central focus of this study. Unaccompanied migrant women from Western Ukraine who work in eldercare and cleaning form the dominant core of the congregation and represent approximately 80–90% of regular church attendees during Saturday and Sunday services as well as during major religious holidays.

Alongside this predominantly female population, the community also includes Ukrainian men, most of whom are labor migrants who arrived in Israel alone for work. A smaller number of married Ukrainian men have migrated together with their wives, primarily before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when travel restrictions on men of military age were introduced.

The parish also includes a limited number of families with children. These families often consist of mixed Ukrainian–Israeli couples, mothers who arrived in Israel with their children as refugees following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or parents who came to Israel with their children as part of medical migration in order to receive treatment for serious illnesses such as cancer. Consequently, although women constitute the clear majority of participants in the parish's religious life, the community also includes a smaller presence of men and families with children.

Accordingly, the parish priest conducts baptisms for children and occasionally performs marriage ceremonies. Pilgrimages organized by the parish similarly attract a somewhat broader group of participants, including Ukrainian male labor migrants, and the priest himself typically accompanies these journeys.

Migrant Christian churches in Israel often function as semi-autonomous institutions, providing religious authority, social support, and community boundaries in a context where the state largely refrains from intervening in migrants' internal religious affairs (Kemp and Rajjman 2003). The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Israel can be understood as operating within this semi-autonomous religious sphere.

4. Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this article integrates three interconnected strands of scholarship. First, it draws on ritual theory that conceptualizes ritual as a flexible, embodied, and context-sensitive practice beyond formal institutional settings. Second, it engages with research on Ukrainian folk-national culture as a ritual repertoire, emphasizing the role of vernacular practices, symbols, and embodied traditions in sustaining collective belonging, particularly in contexts of war and displacement. Third, it builds on feminist

scholarship on women's ritual practices, focusing on gendered forms of religiosity, care, and everyday ritual creativity in migration. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for developing the analytical concept of post-liturgical female rituals and for examining their emergence at the intersection of religion, gender, labor migration, and war.

Ritual and Ritualization: From Classical Definitions to Flexible Practices Classical sociological and anthropological approaches conceptualized ritual as a collective, symbolic, and repetitive practice through which social order is constituted and sustained. [Durkheim \(1995\)](#) emphasized ritual's role in distinguishing the sacred from the profane and reinforcing social solidarity through shared participation, while [Turner \(1969\)](#) focused on ritualized sequences in rites of passage that mark and manage transitions in social life.

[Rappaport \(1999\)](#) further defined ritual as invariant and formalized action that generates authoritative meaning, moral obligation, and social continuity through repetition and canonical form. Across these perspectives, ritual appears as a stable and institutionalized practice grounded in authoritative traditions.

From the late twentieth century onward, scholars increasingly questioned such fixed definitions, turning attention to informal and personalized ritual practices. [Myerhoff's \(1978\)](#) notion of definitional ceremonies highlighted ritual as a means through which individuals and marginalized groups can "reappear" on their own terms before an audience of witnesses, thereby affirming identity and social meaning beyond official cultural or religious frameworks. [Bell \(1997\)](#) reconceptualized ritual through the notion of ritualization, emphasizing ritual as a strategic mode of action that differentiates practices and produces symbolic significance through embodied performance rather than fixed tradition. [Grimes \(2014\)](#) similarly approached ritual as a flexible and ongoing process involving adaptation, experimentation, and invention, particularly where established forms prove insufficient.

[Handelman's \(1990\)](#) concept of proto-events offers a bridge between formal and informal ritual. Proto-events resemble ritual action but lack full institutional recognition or fixed naming, allowing actors to experiment with symbolic forms and social relations. Together, these approaches frame ritual not as a fixed category but as a flexible, embodied, and sometimes provisional mode of meaning-making.

Building on this conceptual shift, this article develops the analytical concept of post-liturgical female rituality, understood as informal, spontaneous, and adaptive practices enacted in close temporal or symbolic proximity to official liturgy or the Christian religious calendar, yet outside canonical frameworks. While these practices extend ritual action beyond formal liturgical structures, they should not be understood as entirely detached from classical theories of ritual. As [Rappaport \(1999\)](#) suggests, ritual actions often carry layers of symbolic meaning that exceed the intentions of their performers. In this sense, post-liturgical practices may also be interpreted as a particular extension of established ritual forms, through which familiar religious symbols and actions are reworked within informal, gendered social contexts.

The following section situates these practices within folk-national culture as a ritual repertoire.

5. Folk-National Culture as a Ritual Repertoire

Folk culture can be understood as a shared repertoire of vernacular traditions, everyday practices, and symbolic expressions transmitted across generations, including oral, performative, material, and embodied forms such as songs, ritual practices, traditional dress, foodways, and festive customs ([Brunvand 1986](#); [Dundes 1999](#)). National culture refers to the symbolic frameworks through which a nation imagines itself as a collective and sustains boundaries of belonging through shared meanings and representations ([Anderson 1983](#)). These two domains are often closely intertwined, as vernacular traditions become

mobilized as national symbols, particularly during periods of political rupture, crisis, or war (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). This interrelation is especially salient in contexts of displacement and diaspora, where everyday cultural practices function as portable resources of national belonging and continuity.

In the Ukrainian case, folk culture has long played a central role in sustaining national identity, particularly through practices linked to religious calendars, seasonal rituals, and communal celebrations. Ritual singing constitutes a key element of this cultural field. Ukrainian Christmas carols, for example, operate as a form of ritual discourse that combines religious, mythological, and national registers while remaining historically flexible and open to adaptation (Andreichuk 2025). Similar dynamics characterize Ukrainian folk religious theatre, especially the *vertep* nativity tradition, which has demonstrated resilience across periods of repression and has been repeatedly reactivated in response to political upheavals, including post-1991 independence and contemporary war (Sendetskyy 2023).

Material and embodied culture likewise play a significant role in the reproduction of national belonging. Traditional Ukrainian foodways have long functioned as more than everyday culinary practices. Dishes such as *borshch*, *varenyky*, and *salo* operate as culturally dense symbols through which Ukrainian belonging is performed and transmitted across generations. Historical research shows that gastronomic traditions were repeatedly mobilized as markers of national distinction in periods when Ukrainian sovereignty was politically constrained and cultural boundaries of belonging were contested (Kazakevych 2019). In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion, these meanings have gained renewed visibility, as the preparation and circulation of traditional foods has become intertwined with wartime practices of resilience, cultural resistance, and national continuity (Varypaiev 2025). Similar processes are evident in the domain of dress and textile culture. The *vyshyvanka* has long functioned as a marker of Ukrainian cultural identity and gained renewed symbolic visibility following the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 (Greet 2024). Historically associated with women's domestic labor, embroidery highlights the gendered dimensions of folk-national culture and positions women's embodied practices as central carriers of national meaning in times of crisis. Since 2022, national symbolism has further intensified through the expanded circulation of Ukrainian flags and related imagery across public, institutional, and digital spaces, alongside new forms of cultural resistance that combine traditional symbols with contemporary media practices (Oprysk 2025; Kiss et al. 2024).

Viewed through this literature, Ukrainian folk-national culture emerges as a flexible, politicized, and gendered ritual repertoire that becomes particularly visible under conditions of war, displacement, and symbolic struggle.

6. Women, Ritual, and Patriarchy: Post-Liturgical Practices in Contexts of Migration and War

Feminist scholarship has long demonstrated that ritual practices within institutionalized religions often reproduce gendered hierarchies, positioning women in marginal and subordinate roles while ritual authority and canonical leadership remain largely male-dominated. At the same time, research consistently shows that women actively engage with and rework these patriarchal structures through ritual practice rather than simply accepting exclusion.

This scholarship identifies two broad modes of women's ritual agency. The first focuses on women's engagement within institutional religious frameworks, where ritual meanings are subtly reinterpreted through everyday, embodied, and informal practices. The second emphasizes the creation of alternative or explicitly feminist rituals outside

institutional religion, often grounded in overt challenges to patriarchal authority. While analytically distinct, these modes often overlap in lived practice.

The first mode is illustrated by studies of women's ritual practices in conservative religious contexts. Sered (1992) shows how elderly Orthodox women gain moral authority through informal ritual expertise in domains such as healing and death, without directly challenging institutional hierarchies. Mahmood's (2005) ethnography of women's Islamic piety movements in Egypt reconceptualizes agency as emerging through disciplined, embodied practices that inhabit rather than resist normative religious traditions. Avishai (2008) similarly emphasizes everyday practice as a site of "doing religion," demonstrating how Orthodox Jewish women actively sustain and reinterpret religious norms. Stadler (2015) further shows how women's pilgrimages within institutional Christianity and Judaism enable feminine interpretations of sacred space while remaining embedded in conservative frameworks. Berry (2006) offers a bridging perspective by examining women's informal practices of ritualizing as a strategy for marking life transitions that are often socially invisible or institutionally unrecognized. Drawing on feminist critiques of Turner's theory of liminality, Berry argues that women's thresholds frequently differ from the socially sanctioned rites of passage emphasized in classical ritual theory. Rather than occurring through clearly bounded, publicly authorized rituals, women's transitions are often gradual, ambiguous, and negotiated within everyday life. Importantly, Berry shows that such ritualizing does not necessarily entail a departure from religious traditions. Instead, women frequently draw on familiar religious vocabularies and symbolic repertoires while reworking them in personalized, embodied, and relational ways. In this process, ritual action may be deliberately set apart as sacred while simultaneously blurring boundaries between sacred and profane, as women's rituals often unfold in domestic spaces and merge into practices such as conversation, storytelling, and shared meals.

The second mode of feminist ritual scholarship focuses on alternative ritual invention outside institutional religion. Northup (1997) documents feminist rituals created around embodied experience and life transitions, while Ross (1998) analyzes Christian women's ritual creativity beyond church structures. Prashizky (2009) shows how alternative Jewish wedding rituals challenge patriarchal authority symbolically, while also highlighting the limits of ritual change when unaccompanied by legal or economic transformation.

This article situates women's post-liturgical rituals within the first mode. These practices do not seek to reform official liturgy or articulate explicit feminist critique, but rather extend patriarchal religious frameworks through informal, adaptive, and embodied practices enacted after formal rituals. Post-liturgical female rituality thus constitutes a subtle form of challenge grounded in reinterpretation, continuity, and everyday agency.

Women's ritual agency acquires additional meanings under conditions of migration and displacement. Migration scholarship emphasizes women's central role in sustaining the culture of origin through gendered everyday practices. Studies of migrant women's food practices show how cooking and shared meals function as ritualized acts that preserve memory, belonging, and emotional ties to the homeland (Ore 2018). These practices resonate with feminist analyses of women's ritual creativity in informal and non-canonical domains.

In wartime contexts, women's ritual labor becomes further invested with national significance. Yuval-Davis (1997) conceptualizes women as symbolic, cultural, and moral reproducers of the nation during periods of crisis. Building on this framework, Solari (2017) demonstrates how Ukrainian women have historically carried moral and emotional responsibility for national continuity, particularly in contexts of migration and war. As Stadler (2015) also shows, women's embodied religious practices may acquire heightened national meaning, linking care, suffering, and faith to collective endurance.

Together, this scholarship highlights women's ritual practices as gendered forms of continuity and meaning-making shaped by patriarchy, migration, and war. In contexts of displacement and national crisis, women's rituals function as everyday practices through which religion, belonging, and moral responsibility toward the nation are sustained and rearticulated.

7. Methodology

This ethnographic study examines the everyday lives of Ukrainian female temporary labor migrants in Israel through a qualitative research design that combines three complementary methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography.

The empirical material is based on 26 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Ukrainian migrant women and one interview with the male priest who leads the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Jaffa. The interview with the priest provided important contextual information regarding the history of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Israel, the approximate size and composition of the parish community, and the pastoral and community activities organized by the church in Jaffa and in other cities. While this background information informed the contextual framing of the study, the priest's perspective is not included in the empirical analysis presented in this article, as the research focuses specifically on women's interpretations and practices surrounding post-liturgical female rituals.

Interviews were conducted primarily in Russian, which functioned as a shared second language among participants who were educated during the Soviet period.

I am an Israeli social anthropologist and a Russian-speaking migrant from the former Soviet Union who has lived in Israel for the past 35 years. While Ukrainian is the native language of all participants, the use of Russian became a sensitive and occasionally ambivalent choice following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as the language is increasingly associated with Russian aggression. Our shared post-Soviet background and use of Russian thus constituted both a bridging experience and a sensitive, conflictual context. I was fully aware that agreeing to be interviewed in Russian was not self-evident for the women, and I consistently expressed my deep gratitude for their willingness to share their experiences in this language.

As an Israeli citizen with a secure legal status, my position in the field was marked by a degree of structural privilege in relation to the participants, many of whom held temporary visas or lived under conditions of legal uncertainty. This created an asymmetry between researcher and participants that I remained attentive to throughout the fieldwork. At the same time, our shared linguistic and post-Soviet background facilitated communication and trust, even as the use of Russian carried ambivalent meanings during wartime. I was repeatedly struck by the openness and hospitality of the women's community, both during church services and in informal gatherings, shared meals, and pilgrimages. Throughout the research process, I also shared aspects of my research interests and emerging insights with many interviewees, and in this sense I came to view the women not only as participants but also, to some extent, as interlocutors in the research process.

Participant observation was conducted during weekend services and major religious holidays at the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Jaffa, as well as during informal gatherings of women following church services. These gatherings often took place in nearby cafés, public spaces, parks, and small private apartments or rooms rented by the women. Observations in these settings enabled close attention to embodied ritual practices, social interactions, and the extension of liturgical time into informal, post-liturgical spaces.

The study also incorporates digital ethnography, including the analysis of Facebook posts published by women from the research sample and posts from the Facebook page of

the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Jaffa. In addition, the analysis draws on recorded materials from women's collective gatherings and religious events from previous years, allowing for a longitudinal perspective on ritual practices and community life.

Participants were recruited primarily through a key informant, Dana, a Ukrainian migrant woman with extensive social ties within the local community, who facilitated initial access and introduced the researcher to other participants. Most interviews were conducted by phone due to participants' demanding work schedules, while several took place in person. Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours and addressed themes including migration trajectories, labor conditions, religious belief and practice, community life, and experiences of war-related uncertainty. Several participants were interviewed on two or three occasions.

The women interviewed were middle-aged, with an average age of approximately 50, and most were highly educated, holding professional degrees obtained in Ukraine. The majority originated from Western Ukraine and migrated to Israel as temporary labor migrants in order to support family members remaining in Ukraine. On average, participants had been living in Israel for approximately nine years. Most were divorced or widowed, while others maintained transnational marriages. All participants were engaged in low-wage care and domestic work in Israel, despite their professional backgrounds, reflecting common patterns of deskilling in female labor migration. For many, migration to Israel was understood as temporary but prolonged, shaped by economic necessity and, more recently, by the ongoing war in Ukraine.

All participants were employed in domestic and caregiving labor in Israel: fifteen worked in live-in eldercare and eleven in cleaning services. Live-in caregivers are typically recruited through private agencies, which charge high placement fees, and are granted legal work visas. They reside in their employers' homes and are permitted to return to Ukraine once a year. Women employed in cleaning, by contrast, often enter Israel on tourist or pilgrimage visas and secure work through informal social networks. Many become undocumented and thus face ongoing legal precarity, including the risk of deportation; some attempt to regularize their status through asylum claims. While cleaning workers generally enjoy greater flexibility in their daily work arrangements and housing, they are unable to leave and re-enter Israel, resulting in prolonged separation from family members in Ukraine.

Most participants identified with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, reporting varying levels of religiosity shaped by childhood church attendance and prayer practices. Many had prior experiences of labor migration to Poland or Russia and came to Israel due to its relatively higher wages. At the same time, Israel's symbolic significance as the Holy Land also informed their migration choices, drawing on a long-standing representation of Jerusalem as a sacred place in Ukrainian folk tradition (Fialkova 1997).

Many interviewees reflected on the parallel experience of living through the war in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 and the war in Israel after the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023. Although a systematic comparison lies beyond the scope of this article, participants consistently described the war in Ukraine as more emotionally overwhelming, due to ongoing concern for relatives who remained there. Several women articulated a sense of physical presence in Israel combined with emotional attachment to Ukraine, echoing Cvajner's (2019) notion of "being here but not fully here." At the same time, the relative economic stability afforded by work in Israel intensified women's sense of obligation to financially support family members living under wartime conditions in Ukraine.

Since February 2022, Israel has adopted a non-enforcement policy regarding the employment of Ukrainian citizens who are legally present in the country, allowing them

to work without enforcement actions in recognition of the ongoing war and the risks associated with return.

Fieldwork was conducted between late 2024 and the present. The study adopts a phenomenological approach, focusing on women's own interpretations and narratives of their migratory experiences. Interview transcripts and ethnographic materials were thematically coded using an inductive approach informed by grounded theory principles. Ethical considerations included informed consent, the use of pseudonyms, and approval by the institutional ethics committee of the author's academic institution. In order to protect participants' anonymity in a context of legal and social vulnerability, all personal identifiers were altered. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and identifying details such as places of origin, specific occupations, and other potentially recognizable biographical information were modified. Similar precautions were taken in the analysis of digital materials to ensure that individuals could not be identified through online content. Participants were informed about the research aims and provided consent for the use of interview and observational material.

8. Results

The empirical findings are organized around three central themes that capture different dimensions of women's post-liturgical rituals in the context of labor migration and war.

The first theme examines women's post-church gatherings as informal, community-making rituals that extend liturgical time into social spaces. The second theme focuses on embodied post-liturgical practices, including food preparation and shared meals, collective singing, and traditional dress. The third theme explores the impact of the war in Ukraine on women's post-liturgical rituals, highlighting practices of prayer, pilgrimage, national symbolism, and emotional labor oriented toward the homeland.

9. Women's Post-Church Gatherings as Community-Making Rituals

What kinds of women's rituals are examined here? The practices discussed in this section consist of gatherings that take place shortly after official church services on Sundays or Christian holidays such as Easter and Christmas. These meetings occur in a variety of informal settings: sometimes women share a festive meal in a side room of the church immediately after the service; at other times they gather in a nearby park for an Easter picnic, eating food prepared at home and blessed by the priest. In other cases, women eat together during pilgrimages organized by the church community, sing together on buses on the way to sacred sites, meet at cafés, or walk along the seashore after church services. During Christmas, women sometimes organize verstep performances involving costumes, singing, and festive meals in the church courtyard immediately following the liturgy.

Across these settings, gatherings are consistently accompanied by women's collective Ukrainian singing. After Christmas services, women sing *kolyadky*; they wear embroidered Ukrainian blouses (*vyshyvanky*) and share Ukrainian dishes prepared specifically for these occasions. Some meetings take place in small private apartments or rented rooms belonging to women who, unlike most labor migrants, have limited access to private space. These women's gatherings typically constitute a direct continuation of the church service and are therefore conceptualized here as post-liturgical rituals. In interviews, many women emphasized the importance of these gatherings as substitutes for family life and as central sites for creating social networks in migration.

These post-liturgical rituals are primarily organized and enacted by women, who prepare food, arrange gatherings, sing, and engage in extended conversations, thereby shaping these events as predominantly female spaces. At the same time, they are not entirely exclusive. A small number of male participants regularly attend, including single

male labor migrants and, more occasionally, one or two married men who come together with their wives to church services and subsequently join the gatherings. The parish priest, as the leader of the community, also participates in some of these occasions. For example, during post-church picnics near the church or in private apartments, a few men were present alongside the larger group of women, although I did not observe the participation of children in these gatherings. A similar pattern emerged during organized pilgrimages: buses departing from the Jaffa parish typically included the priest and his assistant seated at the front, where they led prayers at the beginning of the journey, while a small group of young single men occupied the rear seats. The bus itself, however, was overwhelmingly filled with women, and the journey took on a distinctly gendered atmosphere, characterized by collective singing, laughter, and conversations among women.

For example, Valeriya's ability to host post-liturgical gatherings was closely linked to her housing conditions. Unlike many Ukrainian female labor migrants who lived in overcrowded apartments, shared rooms, or in the homes of elderly employers, Valeriya rented a small private apartment that afforded her a rare degree of spatial autonomy. This private domestic space enabled her to invite other women, many of whom lacked such possibilities, and to transform her home into a post-liturgical gathering site. She became a central figure in the Greek Catholic community, regularly hosting women in her small rented apartment for Sunday gatherings after church. Valeriya, 58, divorced and a mother of two, previously worked as a vegetable vendor in a market in Lviv. She has lived in Israel for nine years and is currently employed in cleaning services.

"Every Sunday, after the church service, we would come out together, twenty women standing outside, talking. We would ask ourselves, 'Where should we go now?' The sea was too windy, cafés were too small, sometimes we sat in the park near the church and we were too many. So I started inviting the women to my home. To make space in my tiny apartment, I had to take apart my bed: I would lift the mattress, remove the legs, and push everything against the wall. Then we brought a table from the kitchen, set up two tables in the room, and laid out the plates."

Many women described these post-church gatherings as emotionally meaningful extensions of religious time, particularly in the absence of family life in Israel.

Olha, 52, married and a mother of three, is a trained teacher from Sokal. She has lived in Israel for eight years and currently works in cleaning services:

In Ukraine, we have a tradition that most people do not work on Sundays. Sunday is a holy day of God. They go to church in the morning and then gather with family. But in Israel, many of us are alone. When I first arrived, I felt like a yellow leaf in the wind, a leaf that had fallen from the tree and was hanging there by itself. You walk outside and you don't know where to go or who to talk to. We are working women, but we are used to having family, husbands, children, and here we miss all of that. So these Sunday meetings filled that empty space. We went to church together, listen to the god word and then we stayed together afterward to eat and sing and laugh together. All the women we became like sisters."

Another interviewee emphasized the anticipation surrounding these gatherings as a weekly rhythm that structured women's lives beyond work:

"All the women really look forward to these Sunday gatherings. We work hard all week, and we wait for Sunday prayer and the women's meeting afterward." These are our "Жіночі недільні посиденьки".

Digital materials further illuminate the ritualized character of these gatherings and their embedding in the Christian calendar. A Facebook post by Bogdana, dedicated to the eve of St. Andrew, describes a festive dinner she organized in a park in Tel Aviv. Bogdana

(60), married and a mother of two, is a trained nurse from Sokal who has lived in Israel for eight years and currently works in eldercare.

“On the eve of St. Andrew, we gathered for a warm and truly homemade Ukrainian evening dinner, opening the Christmas cycle of holidays. The atmosphere was full of unity and good mood, and although we are far from home, every woman felt a piece of Ukraine, its tradition and warmth.

The evening included carols and old songs, festive food such as dumplings and homemade dishes, photos, and small crafts we made together, including scented rosemary bags and ribbons as symbols of support and reciprocity.

For us, Ukrainian women in Israel, such gatherings are not just a holiday. They are a way to preserve our identity, support one another, and keep the warmth of our culture alive. In every song, every ornament, and every dumpling, we carry our connection to the homeland. May there be peace in Ukraine, Israel, and the whole world.”

A private Christmas greeting sent between two Ukrainian women in Israel similarly reflects the blending of nostalgia, humor, and ritual continuity in migratory settings:

Here we are again, welcoming Christmas not in Ukraine, but among palm trees, rosemary bushes, and eternally surprised Israeli cats. And who could have imagined that we would be cooking kutia in a pot meant for hummus, and that instead of frost we would be “bitten” by the sun?

But looking back, I realize that it is precisely here that we have learned to value our traditions even more. That’s what an emigrant woman’s life is like: somewhere between nostalgia, laughter, and new habits. And through all of this, you are my support, my voice of the homeland, my companion in conversations about everything, from varenyky to vechornytsi in the park.

I wish you warmth like that of a Ukrainian stove, joy like our girls’ gatherings, and a miracle that will find you even among the noisy Israeli streets.

Taken together, these examples show how women’s post-liturgical gatherings operate as ritualized social practices that extend official church liturgy into informal, gendered spaces. Consistent with broader approaches to ritual that emphasize process, embodiment, and context rather than formal structure (Bell 1997; Grimes 2014; Handelsman 1990), these gatherings demonstrate how ritual meaning is produced through everyday practices anchored in the Christian calendar yet enacted beyond institutional settings. In line with feminist scholarship on women’s ritual practices (Sered 1992; Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005), these post-liturgical rituals do not challenge religious authority directly but reinterpret and sustain religious life through embodied, relational, and non-canonical forms of practice. Centered on food, singing, prayer, and mutual support, women’s gatherings function as gendered rituals of care and community-making that transform sociality itself into a meaningful extension of religious life under conditions of labor migration and displacement.

10. Embodied Post-Liturgical Practices: Food, Song, and Dress

This ethnographic study also attends to the sensory, aesthetic, and embodied dimensions of Ukrainian women’s post-liturgical rituals in Israel. In this section, I offer ethnographic observations on the beauty and musicality that characterize women’s gatherings, focusing on collective singing, traditional embroidered dress, and the preparation and sharing of Ukrainian festive foods. These practices are not marginal embellishments of religious life but central elements through which women experience, perform, and extend religious meaning beyond the church.

All post-liturgical gatherings of Ukrainian women in Israel are accompanied by singing. I was struck by the musicality of Ukrainian women and by the fact that they sing together at every possible opportunity: during Easter picnics outside the church, on buses returning from pilgrimages to Jerusalem, during shared festive meals following Christmas services, and in private apartments. Singing includes both religious hymns and Ukrainian folk songs. Some women also participate in the church choir, which accompanies Sunday services and major religious holidays.

Equally striking is the visibility of vyshyvanky, traditional Ukrainian embroidered blouses and dresses which stand out vividly in the Israeli landscape. During festive church services, the church is filled with women wearing embroidered garments in different colorful styles. The predominantly white fabric, richly decorated with embroidery, creates a visually powerful collective presence that is immediately noticeable.

Food constitutes another central and highly visible component of women's post-liturgical gatherings. Ukrainian dishes and festive foods are carefully prepared and shared during women's meetings, forming an integral part of these ritual occasions. I often found myself leaving gatherings with containers of kutia after women's Christmas meals or with slices of paska baked by women for Easter and shared during women's picnics in the park near the church.

The central focus of this section is therefore on embodied women's practices of appearance and dress, food preparation and shared eating, and collective singing. In interviews, women used rich and evocative language to describe the meanings these practices hold for them, illuminating how bodily, sensory, and aesthetic dimensions become key sites through which post-liturgical ritual life is enacted and experienced.

Oksana, 58, divorced and a mother of two, is a trained professional baker from Lviv. She has lived in Israel for ten years and currently works in cleaning services.

"For Ukrainian women, singing is like a thread that runs through the entire life course. Everything was done through singing, and everyone knew how to sing. Even in the hardest times, singing continued. People who survived Stalinist camps said that in the settlements in Siberia, Ukrainians were not always visible, but they were always heard. They sang while working and they sang while resting. That is why singing feels like a 'thread of life', something that carries us through memory, endurance, and survival."

Alongside collective singing, women emphasized the symbolic and emotional significance of traditional embroidered dress, particularly in festive and religious contexts. Oksana explained:

"Wearing a vyshyvanka here in Israel gives me a strong sense of pride. When you put on a vyshyvanka, it feels like wearing a crown on your head. It is not just 'pride'; it is something deeper and almost impossible to explain. You have to wear it to understand."

Food, however, emerged as the most sensorially charged and emotionally complex element of women's post-liturgical practices, closely intertwined with memories of home, religious devotion, and everyday adaptation in migration.

Women's accounts reveal both longing for familiar tastes from Ukraine and an ongoing process of adjustment to the Israeli food environment, including the incorporation of local foods and the reliance on so-called "Russian shops" as accessible spaces for acquiring non-kosher products associated with post-Soviet culinary traditions.

Iryna (60), widowed and a mother of one, is a trained teacher from Lutsk. She has lived in Israel for eight years and currently works in cleaning services.

"When I first arrived in Israel, I was surprised by how different the vegetables and fruit tasted. It was very hard for me to get used to the local food. When someone brings something from Ukraine, even a small product, it feels like a celebration. Recently, the

Jewish family I work with brought honey from Uman. I recognized it immediately as Ukrainian linden honey and asked to taste it. It affected me deeply. The same happens when someone brings Ukrainian salo. You can find salo here too, even in Russian shops, but it is simply not the same. I miss our food deeply, and I am really waiting for the day I return to Ukraine and eat what feels truly familiar. Over time, I have also adapted. For example, I could not eat hummus before, and now I do."

Women described a wide range of festive eating practices, from large collective meals involving dozens of women to small, intimate gatherings of two or three friends, and even solitary celebrations shaped by work constraints and limited control over time off during religious holidays. These examples illustrate how women negotiate the observance of the Christian calendar under restrictive labor conditions, creatively sustaining religious festivity despite structural limitations.

Halina (55), married and a mother of two, is a trained nurse from Ivano-Frankivsk. She has lived in Israel for five years and currently works in eldercare.

In our women's gatherings, food was always central. We prepared traditional dishes for birthdays and holidays. On Christmas Eve, we set a traditional fasting table, and we always had varenyky. In Ukraine, we also used to make pies and varenyky with cracklings, cabbage, cottage cheese, or potatoes with sauerkraut. And somehow, Christmas varenyky always taste special. Even my friend once told me in Israel, 'Christmas varenyky have a different taste. Our food is part of who we are, like a person's handwriting.'

Olha explained:

"Easter is the most important holiday of the year for Christians. In Ukraine, people make special efforts to prepare festive foods for the holiday and to color eggs, and it is considered a great virtue to work hard, cook the food, and have it blessed, so that it carries God's blessing and can be eaten during the holiday. This is understood as a form of devotion, and the food is treated with deep reverence. That is why it is so important for us Ukrainians in Israel to have meat, sausage, and eggs, and to celebrate together with blessed food. Women who have access to an oven at home make an effort to bake a festive Easter cake (paska). In Ukraine, Easter is celebrated at home with the family, whereas here in Israel we eat together in women's celebrations."

Kutia is a traditional ritual dish commonly prepared in Eastern Christian contexts and is also widely practiced among Ukrainian Greek Catholic communities, especially during the Christmas season. It is typically made from grains (such as wheat or rice) mixed with sweet ingredients. Maryna, 51, divorced and a mother of two, is a trained teacher from Lviv. She has lived in Israel for seven years and currently works in cleaning services. She described preparing kutia and sharing it with her friends:

"I started working for a cleaning company in a high-rise building. Three of us, Ukrainian women, would meet in the morning for coffee and later have lunch together. We became friends. When Christmas came, we could not really celebrate properly because we had to work. So I decided that, for God, I would prepare our ritual dish, kutia. I made a huge amount, using a five-liter bucket. I did not have wheat, so I used brown rice instead. I added honey syrup, poppy seeds, raisins, and nuts. At first it was quite liquid, but the rice kept absorbing everything and swelling. What I thought would be about a liter and a half turned into almost three liters of kutia. The three of us kept eating it and still could not finish it. It was funny, and it was delicious. We ate it for two days, and on the second day I packed some into small containers for my friends to take home. I told them, 'Take it with you and share it with others.'

The following example illustrates a solitary form of post-liturgical celebration, in which a woman marked the Easter holiday on her own when work obligations prevented her from attending church or joining collective gatherings. Diana, 50, widowed and a mother of one, is a trained manager from Sokal. She has lived in Israel for seven years and currently works in cleaning services.

“Ukrainian women here often celebrate together if they have a group of friends. But two years ago I was working in Tel Aviv and could not go to church. Around two in the afternoon I suddenly thought, ‘I am missing the holiday feeling. Why shouldn’t I celebrate Easter?’ So I went from work to the nearby Carmel Market. I bought some good sausage, boiled eggs from an Arab vendor, and a sweet bun with white icing, like paska. I also bought a cola, sat down in a park, laid everything out on the grass, and made myself an Easter picnic. Then I called my relatives to wish them a happy Easter and told them that I did not deny myself the pleasure of feeling the holiday.”

Across the accounts presented here, food, song, and dress emerge as key embodied elements of women’s post-liturgical ritual life. Anchored in the Christian calendar yet enacted in diverse and informal settings, these practices constitute gendered rituals centered on care, sensory experience, and social connection. As feminist scholarship on women’s rituals has shown (Sered 1992; Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005), such practices do not seek to challenge religious authority directly but rather sustain religious life through everyday, embodied, and relational forms of engagement. More broadly, they draw on a wider Ukrainian folk-national repertoire of ritualized cultural forms, in which festive foods, embroidered dress, and vernacular singing operate as embodied symbols of collective continuity (Andreichuk 2025; Sendetsky 2023). In particular, Ukrainian festive foodways have long operated as national symbols, historically mobilized as markers of cultural distinction during periods of political constraint and contested sovereignty (Kazakevych 2019). In the contemporary context of Russia’s full-scale invasion, the preparation and sharing of iconic dishes such as borshch, varenyky, and salo has gained renewed significance as a vernacular practice of national resilience and cultural resistance (Varypaiev 2025).

In the context of labor migration, women’s culinary practices further reflect processes of both cultural preservation and adaptation. As studies of migrant women’s food practices suggest (Ore 2018), food operates as a key medium through which women maintain emotional ties to the homeland while adjusting to new social and material environments. The use of Israeli ingredients, the consumption of hummus alongside Ukrainian dishes, and the reliance on “Russian” delicatessens as shared post-Soviet spaces all point to the hybrid and situational character of these practices.

Whether enacted in large collective celebrations, small gatherings, or even solitary festive meals, Ukrainian women transform eating, singing, and dressing into meaningful post-liturgical rituals that sustain religious time, gendered solidarity, and a sense of belonging under conditions of migration and constraint, while simultaneously reproducing a vernacular, folk-national sense of “Ukrainianness” through embodied and sensory forms of cultural practice.

11. Praying for the Nation After Liturgy: Women’s Pilgrimage, Tears, and Hope for Ukraine

This section examines the impact of war on Ukrainian women’s post-liturgical rituals in Israel. In the context of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, women’s post-liturgical practices became increasingly oriented toward national prayer, collective mourning, and expressions of hope for Ukraine’s survival and victory. These rituals are closely connected to prayers for the nation, the carrying of Ukrainian national flags to sacred sites, and

collective supplication for Ukraine in general and for specific military units with which the church community maintains ongoing ties.

Within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Israel, fundraising for the Ukrainian army has become a regular and routinized practice, taking place weekly as part of communal religious life. In the following accounts, women describe both personal and collective forms of prayer enacted in sacred spaces across Israel. For Ukrainian women, Israel is experienced as the Holy Land, and the opportunity to live and pray in this religious landscape was repeatedly emphasized in interviews as a source of spiritual privilege and responsibility.

Women's narratives and digital ethnographic materials highlight gendered roles associated with national support in times of war, including prayer, tears, and supplication on behalf of the nation and its soldiers. These practices draw on culturally familiar feminine forms of religious expression and emotional labor, through which women position themselves as moral and spiritual supporters of the nation during wartime. Olena, a 50-year-old divorced woman and mother of two from Sokal, is a trained nurse. She has been living in Israel for over a decade and currently works in cleaning. After her son volunteered to join the Ukrainian army following the full-scale Russian invasion, she described experiencing overwhelming anxiety and emotional distress. In response, she shaved her head completely, explaining that this bodily act helped her release some of the tension and marked a personal turning point. She also stopped dyeing her hair and has since worn her naturally grey hair with pride. Olena associated the gradual regrowth of her hair with a sense of renewal and found that paying attention to this new growth offered her a small but meaningful form of psychological and physical relief amid ongoing fear for her son's safety.

"After the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukrainian women in Israel started praying more and turning to God, because the soul needs it. Personally, I began going to pray when terrible news started arriving from Ukraine, and traveling to Jerusalem brought me great relief. When so many children were killed in the Mariupol theatre, it was unbearable, and I went to pray for the salvation of their souls. It became a little easier to endure.

Later there was another tragedy, when our prisoners of war were killed and tortured. They were defenseless, suffering, and treated with such cruelty. Again, it was a great relief to have the opportunity to go to Jerusalem and pray for those tormented souls, so that they could find peace.

At that time, I was mostly alone. My son had also gone to war. I was not looking for company, but for a holy place where I could pray by myself. You can come to Jerusalem, to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and speak to God in prayer for those suffering souls. It is such a powerful force.

Olena's account highlights an individualized form of post-liturgical ritual practice, centered on solitary prayer, bodily coping strategies, and personal pilgrimage. In her narrative, prayer is not oriented toward communal gathering but toward seeking sacred space in which grief, fear, and endurance can be processed privately. This form of post-liturgical ritual reflects how women turn to embodied and spatial practices of devotion when direct social support is limited.

Alongside such individualized practices, women also engage in collective post-liturgical rituals organized through the church community. In contrast to solitary prayer, these practices take place within explicitly gendered group settings and are structured around shared movement, singing, and collective supplication in sacred spaces.

Within the Greek Catholic community in Jaffa, the parish priest regularly organizes pilgrimages to Christian holy sites across Israel. These trips often take place on Saturdays

or Sundays, typically after the church service, when a bus departs with women from the congregation accompanied by the priest. During the journey, the women travel together as a group, singing and praying collectively, turning the ride itself into an extension of shared religious practice. In many of these practices, women are photographed holding Ukrainian flags at sacred sites; in a number of these images, the parish priest also appears alongside them, joining in collective prayers and expressions of hope for Ukraine's victory.

Women's collective pilgrimages are not only lived experiences but are also documented and narrated through digital platforms. Facebook posts published by women following these journeys provide insight into how collective prayer, national longing, and religious emotion are articulated and shared beyond the immediate ritual setting.

Reksolana is a 54-year-old divorced woman and mother of two from Lviv. Trained as a history teacher in Ukraine, she has been living in Israel for eight years and currently works in eldercare. She joined one of the church-organized pilgrimages together with other women from the congregation and later published a Facebook post reflecting on her experiences during a Christmas Eve journey to Bethlehem and Jerusalem:

"This road became not just a journey for each of us, but a deep spiritual experience, a prayer of the heart. The morning bells called us to the Service of God, and in our shared prayer we pleaded for peace for Ukraine, Israel, and the whole world. . . We prayed in the Basilica of the Nativity, touching the holy places of Jesus' birth. Tears of both joy and sorrow filled our eyes, as Ukrainians praying for the health of our families and for peace in our homeland, before the smiling icon of the Bethlehem Mother of God. We also visited the Milk Grotto, a sacred place of maternity and miracle. According to ancient tradition, the Holy Family once hid there while fleeing King Herod, and a few drops of the Virgin Mary's milk turned the dark walls of the cave white.

I truly want to believe that our prayers will be answered by God. That the day will come when Ukraine will prosper, and people from all over the world will travel to us with the same love and hope with which we now come to Bethlehem."

Women's post-liturgical rituals increasingly incorporate national symbols and material practices that link religious devotion to wartime solidarity. Fundraising for military units and the circulation of Ukrainian flags introduce tangible objects into women's ritual repertoires, transforming prayer into a visibly national and transnational act.

Yulia described the ritual use of the Ukrainian flag. She is a 50-year-old widow and the mother of one son from Sokal. She is a psychologist who has been living in Israel for nine years and works in cleaning.

"I love traveling around Israel, and I have many photographs with Ukrainian flags. After the war began, I felt a strong need to carry the flag with me. One flag I take with me to Jerusalem, where I pray for Ukrainian soldiers while holding it. The second flag I bring to collective pilgrimages. During church-organized pilgrimages, we arrive at holy sites in the Holy Land. We always take Ukrainian flags with us, pray, and cry for the victory of our soldiers.

When I wrap myself in the flag, I feel that Ukraine is with me. Being far from my homeland only makes my love for Ukraine stronger."

This section shows that women's post-liturgical rituals are not confined to religious expression alone but are closely bound to Ukrainian national identity under conditions of war. Through prayer, pilgrimage, the carrying of national flags, fundraising, and emotionally charged practices of crying, supplication, and hope, Ukrainian women in Israel enact gendered forms of national engagement oriented toward the homeland under conditions of violence and uncertainty. The incorporation of Ukrainian flags into these practices reflects the broader expansion of national-symbolic repertoires following Russia's

full-scale invasion, in which the flag has become an especially visible and emotionally charged marker of belonging and resistance (Oprysk 2025; Kiss et al. 2024). These practices resonate with Yuval-Davis's (1997) analysis of women as symbolic reproducers of the nation, particularly in moments of national crisis.

Building on Solari's (2017) research on Ukrainian women, the findings illustrate how women assume a central moral and emotional responsibility for sustaining national continuity during wartime, especially in migratory contexts where direct political participation is limited. Women's post-liturgical rituals function as everyday yet powerful forms of national labor, through which care, faith, and emotional endurance are mobilized on behalf of Ukraine and its soldiers.

In this sense, post-liturgical female rituals emerge as gendered, faith-based practices through which national belonging, maternal symbolism, and moral responsibility toward the homeland are enacted and sustained during war. Importantly, these practices do not rely on their incorporation into official liturgical calendars or institutional church settings. Although enacted outside institutional church settings, they draw on a familiar Christian repertoire of prayer and devotion and can therefore be understood as personalized, gendered reinterpretations of liturgical practices during a period of national crisis.

12. Summary

This article examined post-liturgical female rituals among Western Ukrainian Greek Catholic women who migrated to Israel as temporary labor migrants, primarily employed in cleaning and eldercare. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the article explored how women's informal religious practices are shaped by conditions of female labor migration and war. It proposed the analytical concept of post-liturgical female rituality to capture a distinct set of gendered ritual practices that emerge in close temporal and symbolic proximity to official church liturgy, while remaining outside canonical frameworks. Importantly, these practices do not constitute an explicit challenge to male religious authority, but rather reflect women's ritual agency within a deeply patriarchal institutional structure. While these gatherings are predominantly organized and enacted by women, they are not entirely exclusive. In many cases, the parish priest, his assistant, and a small number of male participants—both single and married—also take part in these events. The priest often blesses the food or leads prayers, particularly during pilgrimages, while women remain responsible for organizing, preparing, and hosting the gatherings, thereby sustaining their distinctly gendered character.

Post-liturgical female rituals are characterized by several central features. First, they are informal, flexible, and often spontaneous, lacking formal institutional recognition or fixed ritual scripts. They unfold as extensions of official liturgy yet remain separate from it, allowing women to reinterpret religious meaning through everyday, embodied practices. Second, these rituals are closely anchored in the Christian religious calendar and the church, functioning as a direct continuation of prayer and liturgy while simultaneously exceeding institutional church space. They take place in diverse settings, including parks near churches, side rooms of church buildings, buses traveling to pilgrimages, cafés, private apartments, and other semi-public spaces.

Third, post-liturgical female rituals are enacted through gendered embodied practices, most notably collective singing, the wearing of Ukrainian folk dress (*vyshyvanky*), and the preparation and shared consumption of festive foods. These practices transform ordinary acts such as eating, dressing, and singing into ritualized forms of religious and social engagement.

Fourth, the article demonstrates that post-liturgical female rituality draws not only on Christian liturgy but also on a vernacular Ukrainian folk-national symbolic repertoire. Women's rituals incorporate embodied and material forms of national culture, including traditional dress, festive foodways, and collective musical practices such as folk songs and carols. These elements function as gendered cultural resources through which national continuity is sustained in migration, and through which religious devotion becomes intertwined with sensory, aesthetic, and everyday performances of Ukrainian belonging.

Fifth, in the context of female labor migration, these rituals have a pronounced social dimension, serving as key sites of community-making and emotional support, and fostering women-centered networks that substitute for family life disrupted by migration, labor exploitation, regimes of control and deportability, and the uncertainties generated by the wars in Ukraine and Israel.

Sixth, under conditions of war, post-liturgical female rituals acquire a strong national-symbolic dimension. Practices of prayer, crying, supplication, and pilgrimage become oriented toward Ukraine's survival, victory, and moral endurance. Women carry national flags to sacred sites, pray for specific military units supported by the church, and engage in regular fundraising as part of religious life. In this sense, women enact gendered forms of national care, positioning themselves as moral and emotional supporters of the nation and its soldiers. These practices resonate with long-standing cultural constructions of women as symbolic "mothers of the nation," whose responsibility is to sustain national continuity through care, faith, and emotional labor during times of crisis (Solari 2017).

Seventh, the article shows that women's post-liturgical rituals are not directed exclusively toward Ukraine. Many prayers are articulated simultaneously for peace in Ukraine, Israel, and the wider world, reflecting women's embeddedness in the host society and their moral engagement with its political and security realities. Post-liturgical female rituality thus operates as a transnational, relational practice that links homeland and host country, religion and nation, care and politics.

By conceptualizing these practices as post-liturgical female rituals, the article contributes a new analytical lens for understanding women's religious agency under conditions of temporary labor migration and war. It demonstrates how women sustain religious time, social belonging, and national attachment through informal, embodied, and gendered ritual practices that emerge not in opposition to institutional religion, but through its creative continuation beyond the liturgy.

The concept of post-liturgical female rituality proposed here should not be understood as replacing existing analytical categories such as lived religion, popular piety, or informal ritual practices. Rather, it highlights a specific configuration of gendered ritual action that emerges in close temporal and symbolic proximity to formal liturgy while unfolding in informal social settings. In this sense, the concept contributes to ongoing discussions within the study of lived religion by drawing attention to the ways women extend liturgical time and space through embodied practices that combine religious devotion, social interaction, and cultural expression.

While the empirical case analyzed here reflects the specific circumstances of Ukrainian Greek Catholic migrant women in Israel, the analytical features identified in this study—such as women-centered informal gatherings emerging after formal religious rituals and expressed through embodied practices of singing, food, dress, and collective interaction—may also be relevant for examining similar dynamics in other religious and cultural contexts.

Informal ritual gatherings that extend beyond formal liturgical structures can be observed in various religious contexts, including Judaism and Islam. Future research may therefore explore how similar dynamics emerge across different religious traditions

and migration contexts, and how gendered ritual practices operate in relation to diverse institutional religious frameworks.

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