



Anexa nr.6

REZUMATUL TEZEI DE ABILITARE

Abstract

TITLE: *The traditional world from Moldavia: between magic analogy and functionality*

FIELD: Philology

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The paper aims to receive habilitation in the field of philology, with a specific interest for cultural anthropology. It presents the milestones that I reached in the past sixteen years (since I defended my PhD thesis) while researching folklore and ethnology, intangible cultural heritage, with instruments and concepts that proved multidisciplinary, since they sometimes pertain to sociology, urban anthropology, history of religions, migration studies, psychology and even medicine.

I begin by developing the main idea that became the PhD research topic and I continue the first section of the paper by presenting the scientific activity that followed. Apparently unconnected scientific investigations were carried on during my research funded by the Romanian Academy, Iași Branch: childbirth customs from Moldavia, vernacular architecture and traditional occupations converged, however, towards the same symbols and traditional meanings.

The magic of beginnings is one common point in these analyses, since a certain type of thinking is investing gestures, temporal and spatial contexts with powerful meanings, that are able to influence the future outcomes of events. Good omens are constantly created for the future baby by drawing mental maps of what needs and should not be in her proximity. What she sees, feels or eats determines the physical and mental characteristics of the foetus. After birth, the first objects to touch him/ her were carefully selected by the traditional birth attender, to create professional abilities in the future that will assure the well-being. In fact, contagious magic is activated during every single phase of this rite of passage. For example, the pregnant woman steals wood shavings from a carpenter and place them in her bosom in order to give birth to a child with curly hair, as a preliminary stage of the rite. During separation phase, the Godparents place the baby on a sheep wool, to make him lucky while raising animals, and then, when the post-liminary stage is reached, the child is integrated in his social group by making him/ her choose symbol-objects that foretell his job.

Construction rites also use the magic of beginnings while choosing the right place for the new building, and bringing the priest twice to benedict the settlement. Moreover, the first night that the family sleeps in the new home is indicated to be during a full moon phase, in a day that does not require fasting (this means on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday or Sunday). All these coordinates are obeyed to induce good health, wealth and good luck to the entire family. Ritual building deposits are still found in Moldavian villages, with the purpose to pay a magic

fee for *spiritus loci*, that will watch over the house and grant the family the above-mentioned human ideals. As for the historic occupation of sheep husbandry, the principle of fire is invoked at the activities start: the herd is made to pass over a *living fire*, both when each sheep leaves its owner, and at the beginning of grazing period, in a sheepfold. The reason for what seems a dangerous practice is to ward off diseases and attacks.

A second common line that my ethnological demonstrations reveals is *Traditional ethnics*. A positive selection of the elements within reach divides the environment for pregnant women in taboo places/ sights and much wanted images. It suffices to give a long, hard look to a beautiful person, that the mother will have a child reassembling that human being, according to magic thinking. Choosing the Godparents marks a public moment of social qualities validation, because it is believed that the child will grow up to resemble them, once they baptized him/ her. Being righteous is a raw model that created a fairy-tale type, called *Godfather Death*, ATU 332. We discussed the so-called arrogance that made the peasant from a story collected in Suceava refuse God himself, and Saint Nicholas, when they offered to baptize his child. The reason was that both these sacred entities create uneven opportunities for people, while Death, who will receive the right to Christianise the new-born comes to everybody, being them young or old, rich or poor. This indicates the fact that parents want their offsprings to bring more justice into the world.

Tradition is imposed on the community under this appearance of ethics, one of the most frequent answers to questions like “Why do you pour holy water in the house foundation?” or “Why is it forbidden to say wolf on Saint Andrew’s eve day?” are “This is the right thing to do” or “This is what has to be done!” Any ulterior misfortunate event will be understood as a consequence of breaking traditional rules, as many of the contexts of knowledge transmission contain oral stories that certify the truthfulness and efficiency of rites and superstitions. Migration studies, a secondary interest in my activity, confirms these identity marks for the Romanian individual existence. Whenever the ritual context is inappropriate, special efforts are being made to benefit from the positive symbols, since the wellbeing of the individual is at stake, hence of the entire group he/ she belongs to.

The next conclusion on the archaic thinking system I came to in my authored books and studies was entitled *Moulding the future*. This self-assured attitude towards the hazard of life is deriving from what I describe in a previous chapter as an attempt to influence fate by using



magic, the magic of beginnings. In fact, this demeanour can be traced in pretty much any segment of the Romanian traditional culture, whether it is found in the ingredients of the ritual bath given a day after baptism and then pouring it to a fruit tree, or it consists in the special care for wild animals living next to the house or out in the forests. People are not supposed to wreck the nests of storks or swallows, because they will set the house on fire, but they give away alms for the “good health” of the wolf, as part of the Saint Andrew eve day activities. All the mentioned cultural landmarks are obeyed in full conviction that the future will be bright for the family and the village.

While investigating traditional occupations in my research project I discovered that a childbirth rite that is related to professions is performed identically in Romania and several other Asian countries. The villagers from Moldavia and inhabitants from China, South Korea, Japan and Viet Nam mould the future of their children by choosing some occupational symbols and leaving others aside, since they signify a hard job or a less lucrative one. In our country, people used to place an axe or a needle on the ceremonial tray, depending on the sex of the one-year-old child, but today we can no longer spot them. Instead, parents and Godmothers make a modern selection of bank cards, USB sticks and syringes for the baby to choose from, since they represent better viewed occupations in social perception. Traditional culture is dynamic, it is like a living organism that adapts and evolves, hence international specialists felt the need to design a new concept that can also encapsulate the social and economic aspects of the culture that reached us along generations.

It was the intangible cultural heritage the name that fitted all, and a special chapter dedicated to this approach is creating a critical angle of investigation, by stressing out some strong and weak points of this new perspective on the domain. I named it *More or less: the intangible cultural heritage* and tried to contribute to the field by discussing the consequences of the oversized visibility deriving from inscribing an element on the UNESCO lists.

As an active stakeholder involved in the management of intangible cultural heritage, in my capacity as a member of the national commission and an expert of the Global Network of Facilitators, I find balance in the theoretical approach that I studied as a researcher. The strategies and cultural policies promoted by the multinational institution are filtered through cultural anthropology and the conclusion of such an examination is that the giving full credit to safeguarding measures and over shadowing cultural history can prove risky, on an economic



level also.

Traditional community is under siege from mass-media and social circumstances. Virtual and public environment is often used to uniformize or circulate ideas that are not familiar to the ethnographic areas they reach, while earning a good living led to the depopulation of rural settlements and transmission of traditional knowledge ceased. It takes a sustained effort both from local and national authorities and ethnology experts to increase the public interest, first of all. Education and creating incentives for these cultural practices, while explaining clearly and precisely the tremendous importance of intangible cultural heritage may have a positive impact.

In the second part of the habilitation paper, called *Professional and academic accomplishments*, I summarized the aspects that describe my professional training, didactic activity, the project management and projects development. Furthermore, I stated my contributions to the ethnology field, my abilities and competences, by characterizing my personal development and professional evolution. The research interest was visible in an early stage of the education. As an undergraduate I gave a paper at “Mihai Eminescu” National Conference and received a scholarship to study at “Nicolae Iorga” Romanian Institute for Culture and Humanistic Research from Venice. After graduating from master and doctoral studies, I continued my training by conducting postdoctoral research and taking management courses. Moreover, I was trained in several workshops on implementing the 2003 Convention, organized by the Building Capacity unit from UNESCO.

Didactic activities implied, on one hand, teaching at “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University a practical course on fieldwork research and giving lectures for “A Different School” pupils. On the other hand, I organized a yearly conference that addressed the issue of ethno-didactics. This scientific event gathers specialists in education, crafts persons, museum workers and other cultural heritage stakeholders in order to find the most effective strategies that facilitate traditional information transmission.

The last part of the paper designs a *Career evolution and development plan* that starts from the theme discussed in the first chapter and need to be completed. It also comprises the academic, didactic and project management evolution that are planned for the future.

Research activity will be centred on ethnology, following the fields of passage rites and digitization of intangible cultural heritage. These directions will allow perspectives that benefit



from the history and philosophy of science, science theory, the methodology and ethnics of science, applied logics, cultural anthropology, mythology, history of religions, sociology, cognition sciences, communication and arguing sciences.

On a medium term, I pursue the completion of the already started research projects. As a natural continuation of the information presented so far, two will be the directions to progress in my academic career in the near future: a) first of all, it will consist in fundamental and applied research; b) secondly, it will focus on the education of young professionals and students.

The Folklore Archive of Moldavia and Bucovina will remain at the centre of my scientific endeavours, on all the involved plans of an appropriate conservation and valorisation for the academic environment and general public at the same time. The archived data, summing more than 300,000 documents, will be safeguarded by progressive digitization. Subsequently, synthetic work will publish reliable information on ritual contexts and profound meanings in the form of accessible dictionaries that will contribute to a better acknowledgement of the field.

I will continue to give lectures for the “A Different Academia” programme with the same aim. The students’ interest, as well as the one manifested by teachers has been increasing in the past ten years, the need for trustful explanations became more and more significant. This activity will add to the consultations offered to PhD candidates in my capacity as a member of their examination commissions, hence building a continuity throughout different school ages, with the intention of fostering the acquisition of essential knowledge on Romanian cultural identity, resulting in critical thinking and strengthening the respect for traditional practices performed by local communities.