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# LABOR MIGRATION AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN POSTSOCIALIST RURAL ROMANIA

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LABOR MIGRATION AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL  
HERITAGE IN POSTSOCIALIST RURAL ROMANIA

A dissertation presented by

ALIN RUS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Anthropology



LABOR MIGRATION AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL  
HERITAGE IN POSTSOCIALIST RURAL ROMANIA

A dissertation presented

By

ALIN RUS

Approved as to style and content by:

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Krista Harper, Chair

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Jacqueline Urla, Member

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Jacqueline Urla, Chair  
Anthropology Department

For my patient wife and my caring parents

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există în lumea asta frate ca al meu/ Și la bune și la rele, e fratele meu!” (eng. "In this entire world there's no brother like mine/ To all good and bad, he remains my brother."). Finally, my eternal gratitude, appreciation and esteem go to my grandmother, Elena Murarek, the one who helped, encouraged, and supported me with an abnegation worthy of all admiration. She was the one who always believed in my lucky star. Unfortunately, she passed away a few years before she could see the completion of this stage of my life.

## ABSTRACT

### LABOR MIGRATION AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN POSTSOCIALIST RURAL ROMANIA

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The processes of industrialization and modernization, as well as those emerging from them, have produced radical changes in the lifestyle of peasantry. These transformations went hand in hand with the degradation of community lifestyle and of the customs it contained. Among the many rituals performed by rural communities, this dissertation focuses on mummers' plays. The present paper is an attempt to outline a brief history of mummers' plays beginning with an age when they were simple community rituals and going to the recent decades when they entered a rapid decline, and when state institutions together with international organizations such as UNESCO introduced projects meant to safeguard them.

Based on an extensive field research in Iași County, Eastern Romania, where peasant customary communities are still active today this dissertation takes a path different from most of the peasant studies that preceded it. It focuses on peasant mummers' plays in two rural settlements, and scrutinizes them in relation to the peasant economy and the peasant system of values specific to the rural universe. It analyzes their role in cementing peasant social networks, and their contribution to the dynamic of peasant communities and culture. At the same time, this dissertation embraces a global perspective, and observes closely the transformation of rural customary communities' forms of culture under the great transformations inflicted during the last seven decades by modernization and the advent of

modern forms of entertainment (sport competitions, TV, internet, computer games). Being more appealing to people, these have replaced mummers' plays in the human consciousness despite mummers' success in small-scale agricultural societies throughout centuries. Nevertheless, of all the realities produced by the Industrial Revolution, international labor migration has proven to be the most corrosive, leading not only to the erosion of rural customary communities, but also of their forms of culture such as mummers' plays.

These transformations of rural culture have become very visible and have been observed by folklorists, state authorities, and the peasants themselves. Unfortunately, the methods implemented for safeguarding rural culture are not always appropriate to the rural culture intended to be safeguarded, or to rural communities themselves. At least in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, the methods most often used to patrimonialize mummers' plays have been folklore festivals (Cash 2012). Far from being perfect tools, these festivals involve political, economic, and power relations to which peasants are always subordinate. The close follow-up of these processes shows that, just as peasants take the path of cities in search of better resources, their traditions, too, migrate to the cities through three processes: festivalization, urbanization, mass-mediatisation. Thus, peasants' rituals like mummers' plays turn into simple consumer items devoured by spectators through TV broadcasts and Facebook-like social networks. I used the Bourdieuan symbolic violence concept to show how, by participating in such festivals, the peasants themselves not only become the victims of an external aggression directed against their own culture, but also active agents of this transformation and of the processes that lead to their subordination.

In contrast to this type of patrimonialization, accompanied by symbolic violence, the dissipation of peasant culture through international labor migration has actually spread this culture across all the major cities and countries of the world. Through the story - a companion of human life and culture for millennia, people living in peasant cultures become involuntary agents of safeguarding rural culture in general and mummers' plays in particular, and make their traditions cross the borders of the small rural locality where they were born, to finally become transnational cultural forms.

Employing a series of anthropological methods and strategies - ranging from historical analysis, archive study, participant observation, unstructured interviews, life histories, to visual methods such as filming, taking pictures of winter rural rituals, and photo elicitation, I aim at analyzing and understanding a "social arena" (Bourdieu 1993) mined by

the ambiguities and ambivalences of peasants' commitments and apprehensions concerning the promotion/practices of intangible cultural heritage forms. Simultaneously, I aim at understanding the way intangible cultural heritage is produced, promoted and contested in a postsocialist landscape of inequalities, the restructuring of the old community values, and the intensive labor migration to Western Europe, dramatically depleting the local peasant populations and the social fabric where such rituals used to be anchored in the past.

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## INTRODUCTION

The period that followed the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe was one of major social changes, radical economic transformations, rising inequalities and cleavages (Crowther and Suciú 2013). The Romanian economic system changed from a command economy to a market economy, but the process was painfully slow in comparison with other postsocialist states (Light and Phinnemore 2001). Many factories and state-owned farms collapsed, leading to rampant corruption, unemployment, poverty and widespread social discontent (Kideckel 2008). ‘Accumulation through dispossession’ (Harvey 2005) became one of the most visible occurrences of the postsocialist Romanian society. This process of structural violence affecting a large part of the population became visible - like in many other Eastern European countries after 1989 - through a sharp demographic decline and a massive process of labor migration towards Western European countries. Both these phenomena had a profound economic and social impact (Schröder and Vonderau 2008). But in addition to these changes, easily observable even through statistic data, there was a sharp decline in the practice and promotion of rituals in the rural communities. The capital dispossession process (Harvey 2005) had its counterpart in a cultural dispossession phenomenon (Creed 2011), which is a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2008).

In this context, folklorists and anthropologists witnessed the disappearance or dramatic transformation of several rural cultural forms, mainly the rural communities’ rituals (Neagota and Benga 2011). These have been important elements in the peasants’ life during the last decades (or even centuries, as some authors argued) and successfully adapted (with some important reworking) even during Communism, a system that became well-known for imposing all kinds of modernization projects dramatically changing the life of rural inhabitants, and deeply affecting the political economy of the rural area (Kligman and Verdery 2011). As an expression of the threats affecting cultural intangible heritage in Romania’s rural areas, four of these traditions (*Căluș*, *Doina*, *Christmas Caroling in Masculine Horde* and *Lad’s Dances*) have been recently included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

My main objective is to examine the relationship between winter rituals, an expression of peasants’ system of values, and the challenges brought by modern society, from the proletarianization of the peasants and the patrimonialization of peasant rituals during Communism to labor migration, the advent of mass-media, cable TV networks, advertising

and consumer culture at an unprecedented scale in the context of postsocialist transformations affecting Eastern Europe after 1989.

My extended fieldwork research since 2009 in two eastern Romanian villages heavily affected by all these processes could shed light on the multiple and complicated aspects of the relationship between peasant societies together with their system of values, and the challenges of globalization. Agreeing with Saskia Sassen's thesis that immigration in developed countries is caused mainly by poverty and a stagnant economy (Sassen 1998), my analysis goes beyond these economic indicators and tries to provide a lens that makes us see what happens to the intangible heritage of labor migrants in the new global/transnational reality and process (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013). Through this investigation, my aim is to understand how global capitalism (with its labor migration, commodification, marketization and consumerism) has affected the dynamics and the promotion of the intangible heritage in the sending rural communities – an approach that is understudied in cultural anthropology.

Bridging works on postsocialism (Verdery 2003; Fox 2010) with those on intangible heritage (Smith and Akagawa 2009), transnational migration (Schiller Glick, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1995) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), my research tries to show how the decline and erosion of the local rural cultural heritage is essentially a violent process disenfranchising people of certain cultural forms that they perceive and define as part of their identities (Creed 2011). I see this form of disenfranchisement as an expression of symbolic violence – a subtle form of aggression different from other forms of violence in that the social agents who are the victims of it “contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004). In most cases, this violence goes unnoticed and is misrecognized. This happens because the mind of the subjects over whom it is exercised “is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world” (Idem 2004:272). In heritage literature, this process was called disinheritance (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000).

In my case study, I explore the way the deep changes induced by global capitalism (Sassen 2007) in the political economy of postsocialist Romania during the last two and half decades created inequalities and unemployment that resulted in a massive wave of work migration to Western European countries (Diminescu 2008). The effects of all these

phenomena were a reconfiguration of peasants' values (Fox 2011) and a continuous decline in the ritual commitment and reciprocity - two phenomena ultimately generating the visible transformation and/or erosion of one of the most salient aspects of the rural oral culture – the winter rituals – folk plays (Heintz and Rus 2011).

I examine the mechanisms through which global capitalism (labor migration, capital remittances, marketization and consumerism) became visible in the practice and dynamics of the mummers' plays held by two groups of people who have different status and prestige in their rural community now: labor migrants and non-migrants.

This work “charts” an important missing area in the “uncharted field of anthropology of intangible cultural heritage and migration” (Amescua 2013) – the intangible cultural heritage of the sending communities. My analyses examine the effects of labor migration on both the “expressive dimension of intangible cultural heritage (everything that can be seen in a ritual, like gestures, mimics, actions, behaviors) ...[and] the reflexive, abstract or symbolic dimension of intangible cultural heritage (everything that cannot be seen in a ritual, like knowledge, cosmogonies, intergenerational transmission, a sense of identity and continuity)” (Idem 2013:116). At the same time, my research underscores that intangible cultural heritage is not just a creation of isolated peasant communities, but a safeguarding activity with deep connections to the cultural politics of heritage-making that render the promotion and practice of intangible heritage tributary to the power relations between state institutions, political leaders, and the forces of global capitalism (Bendix 2009). Thus, my project enriches anthropology by bridging disciplines and areas that are not usually linked, thereby opening new paths for the anthropological research.

It also contributes to several bodies of literature such as heritage, anthropology of values, anthropology of play, anthropology of postsocialism and anthropology of violence. These fields studied analytically a series of processes (the dynamics and practice of cultural heritage, labor migration, values, human propensity towards play and symbolic violence) in a separate way, without establishing connections between them. In the meantime, my research could provide heritage professionals and academics with a much-needed case study of the social impact of labor migration and global capitalism challenges on the practice, dynamics and promotion of intangible heritage at local level.

When I started my research, I developed my interest by focusing on three hypotheses:  
1) greater community articulation with global capitalism (as manifested in labor migration,

capital remittances, marketization and consumerism) changes peasant moral perspectives and ritual commitments, erodes and transforms local winter rituals; 2) greater community articulation with global capitalism (as manifested in degrees of emigration, capital remittances, marketization, commodification and consumerism) results in greater status competition within ritual practice and inflicts more violence in/through the rituals; 3) greater community integration in the global capitalism induces a level of symbolic violence into peasant communities that produces changes in the peasant system of values, leading to an erosion and/or transformation of the local rural culture.

Around these hypotheses, I built my main questions: 1) How do peasant communities respond to the influences of global capitalism and how is this response expressed in the practice/promotion of mummers' plays? 2) How does labor migration interact with the practice and promotion of mummers' plays? 3) How does symbolic violence interact with the peasant system of values, and how is this interaction expressed in the practice/promotion of peasant community rituals? 4) What is the relation between the system of values of the peasant communities and the mummers' plays, and what were the consequences on the dynamics and performance of mummers' plays once peasant communities had been infiltrated by the values of the market economy?

With these initial questions for my research, when I advanced in the intricate relations, connections and realities this analysis offered me, I discovered new questions and I faced new dilemmas. The new questions came to light as a result of my comparative approach, when analyzing in parallel mummers' plays in eastern Romanian rural communities and those in other European countries such as Great Britain, Norway, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, as well as further ones like the Canadian island of Newfoundland. The incredible diversity of mummers' plays throughout Europe and even beyond its borders, doubled by striking symbolic and structural resemblances, made me reflect from a comprehensive perspective on the transformations these rituals have gone through in Europe and also elsewhere on the globe.

Following this direction of analysis, I reached a series of more focused questions regarding mummers' plays. In just one century, in Romania, these plays had evolved from peasant communities' ritual forms to cultural forms with a political underlayer used as symbols in building the ideology of national states. Finally, during the last two decades, by means of the capitalist culture and heritage policies, they have become an economic good that

may be consumed just as any other entertainment production of the capitalist society promoted by television or other media. Precisely because of this sensational evolution, the questions I have reached are ampler and, in the meantime, deeper than those I departed from in the beginning:

1) What is the relation between mummers' plays and peasants' system of values? 2) Could a deeper understanding of mummers' plays and of their evolution in time shed light on the history of rural communities in various parts of Europe and even beyond Europe's borders? 3) How could we explain the enormous diversity of mummers' plays across Europe and the amazing similarities between them even at huge distances in time and space? At the same time, how could we explain the enormous success mummers' plays have had for centuries in agricultural societies, considering their mass extinction with the advent of the Industrial Revolution? 4) What happened to peasant mummers' plays after the rise of national states in Eastern Europe during the second half of 19th century?

With these questions in mind, I discovered a "continent" called Europe's *peasantry*. This "continent", consisting of the cultural micro-ecosystems of the rural customary communities, includes mummers' plays too. However, with the Industrial Revolution and the big economic, political, social and cultural transformations it produced, this "large continent" entered a process of disintegration that some authors have called "depeasantization" (Araghi 1995). This process followed a different speed and rhythm for each place. Therefore, in some areas of Europe where the influence of the industrial revolution was late, the peasantry preserved its cohesiveness for a longer period of time. This was also the case of Eastern Europe and especially Romania - an area still dominated by a strong rural culture. Here, mummers' plays are still being performed and represent an important part of these village cultures in rural space even now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the contrary, in countries like Great Britain the challenges brought by the Industrial Revolution appeared as early as 1760 and went on energetically in the following decades throughout the entire country, generating major changes in the peasant communities based on small-scale agricultural production. Paradoxically and unexpectedly, even in industrialized countries like Great Britain or the United States, in the early stages of industrialization, mummers proved their adapting ability, and became part of the worker communities for a while; in the beginning, these working class communities were just as cohesive as the peasant ones (Nissenbaum 1996). But, with the development of modern technologies like press, radio,

television and computers, mummers' plays were soon replaced by other entertainment forms, with a weaker ritual component, and thus much more accessible anytime and anywhere.

I divided the present work in seven chapters, each of them having multiple sections.

In the first chapter, called *Encountering the Field*, I started a journey into Romania's postsocialist universe, still marked by the influence of the socialist society, but also by the increasingly rapid development of market economy. In this world - full of paradoxes and challenges, and undermined by structural violence - the peasants' traditions are often perceived from an idealistic perspective as expressions of a more stable and better organized world where the people's principles and values are more solid than present ones. By presenting the first two days of my field research, and by letting the people I met on the field speak, as well as by describing the unpredicted situations a researcher faces, I tried to depict the relation ordinary Romanians have with rural traditions and the way these traditions are being presented by television. My own reflections and ideas, together with my first recollections about mummers' plays, completed the image. Beyond this partially idealistic universe, the reality of the rural universe - as proved in the presentation of my contact with the anthropologic field - unveiled a series of relations and connections that were much more complex and multifarious.

The second chapter of my dissertation presents information about Heleşteni's rural community that I gathered during my field research since December 2009. I focused my attention on certain winter rituals performed by the inhabitants of this locality like: *Jocul Caprei/ The Dance of the Goat*, *Jocul Cerbului/ The Dance of the Deer* and *Mascații Pantomimici/ The Pantomimic Mummies*. Over time, these rituals pertaining to mummers' plays have suffered certain transformations. However, in their morphology, terminology and symbolism, they have preserved a series of cultural elements that remind us of Heleşteni's past. The linguistic analysis of certain concepts and the study of local archives revealed a vanished world where this rural community was more different of the present one. Mummers' plays emerged from a rural universe more isolated geographically and more cohesive socially than today, a reason for me to describe this complex landscape using the concept of cultural micro-ecosystem.

The analysis of the *Dance of the Goat*, as it had been performed until 2005 in Heleşteni *comună*, introduces it as a liminal rite of passage that unmarried youngsters who had not attended their military service go through; later, after attending the military service,

this rite is gone through once again, this time under a new identity, being followed afterwards by the moment of marriage. If in the past the *Dance of the Goat* was closely connected to the compulsory military service, once this ceased being obligatory in 2005, a new phenomenon seemed to replace it: the youngsters' migration to Western Europe. But, unlike the military service that was precise in terms of start and duration, labor migration is an uncertain phenomenon that only some of the village youngsters get into and only sporadically. Recent economic transformations and the development of market economy raised the youngsters' interest in the money offered by villagers in exchange for the *Dance of the Goat* performed on December the 31<sup>st</sup> and January the 1<sup>st</sup>. Thus, from a liminal rite of passage, the *Dance of the Goat* turned in recent years into a ritual whose main purpose is the profit.

Of all winter rituals in Heleşteni, the *Dance of the Deer* is the most vulnerable in the front of the challenges brought by modern society. A whole series of factors including the demographic decline, the labor migration to Western European countries and poverty have been insisted upon by locals when mentioning the menaces this ritual is facing. Researching the population censuses in the last hundred years and rigorously observing the phenomenon of economic migration, proved that the villagers pointed out well the causes of this ritual's erosion. The noticeable demographic decline after the December 1989 Revolution led to a decrease in the number of children performing this form of folk play. In the meantime, with a fairly high percentage of about 10-15% of young people from Heleşteni who are seasonal or permanent labour migrants to Western Europe, the number of the ones responsible for the ritual's cultural transmission is increasingly low. Under these circumstances, the perpetuation of information regarding mask design, fur sewing and *Deer* mask decoration, as well as the role learning techniques for the characters in this folk play are rather transmitted by persons older than 65 in the most fortunate cases.

Concerning poverty as cause of the decline in the *Dance of the Deer*, my research emphasized a more multifold reality. The reason for the decline of the ritual and for the fact that many villagers no longer welcome *Deer* teams, is not poverty. Instead, rather the social inequalities and the exaggerated increase of the cost of a representation during the last decade were the ones preventing people with lower incomes from affording such expenses for welcoming the *Deer* teams in the locality. The visible decline of this ritual made the comună's representatives focus on dealing with the ritual's safeguarding. However, safeguarding it means most of the times exporting a *Deer* team with many members to the folklore festivals in neighboring cities. But this "export" is done at the expense of the rural



community whose members get to see representations of the *Deer* of their village rather in local television transmissions than in their own courtyard.

Of the rituals in the *comună* of Heleşteni, the *Pantomimic Mummers* is the most vivid one, despite the lack of any attempts at safeguarding it. The *Pantomimic Mummers* also represent one of the most complex rituals in the locality, being also the most inclusive one since, next to young boys and girls, it also accepts children and elders as performers. In the case of the *Dance of the Goat*, but also in that of the *Deer*, things are different since these rituals are less permissive in terms of the performers' age and gender. If at a first glance this ritual seems to be a reversal of the established social order, a more careful and long-standing observation of this complex and rich pageantry shows us that it is permanently governed by strict rules. But there is a difference between these rules and those of an ordinary day of the year. Anyway, during New Year, the mummers' freedom of action and manifestation is very high, and they can make use of the freedom the community grants them in different ways: either for entertaining their hosts with a series of funny sketches, or by a type of controlled violence that goes on until the moment mummers are obliged to take their mask off. This type of violence, manifest through harassing and hassling the "victims", continues on the streets of the *comună* where the aggressors fight the mummers' teams in a sort of symbolic confrontation between the forces of good and those of evil.

The most plausible hypothesis I have reached in analyzing this behavior was that the mummers' violence resembles that of the events in the individual's life, and fighting them actually represents life's struggles. The comparative approach of the behavior of mummers in Heleşteni and those in other areas of the world - such as the Canadian island of Newfoundland - revealed striking similarities. These isomorphic similarities between mummers in regions very distant from one another could be explained by the existence of a system of values common to all the cultural micro-ecosystems represented by the rural communities based on small-scale agricultural work.

In chapter three, I focused on the mummers' play of Ruginoasa comună. The two localities, Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, are bordering on each other, and the distance between their centers is only seven kilometers. However, the way in which their inhabitants provide cultural answers to local events and situations through folk plays presents many divergent aspects. This observation also support the theory of cultural micro-ecosystems outlined in chapter two.

While the moderate violence of the mummers in Heleşteni is accepted by most of the locals, one could not say the same about the *comună* of Ruginoasa where the annual confrontation between the two groups of mummers in the village of Dumbrăvița led in recent years to the hospitalization of many participants, some of them in a serious condition. I was able to explain these forms of extreme violence by going back into the recent history of this locality, a history where the individuals were used to resort to violence in order to articulate certain community problems. Getting used to violence and the effects of this situation generated in certain locals a type of discourse where brutal acts of violence were explained and justified by the existence of a village tradition and of an archaic rural cosmology connected to the New Year's arrival. These discourses embody perfectly Galtung's concept of cultural violence that legitimizes physical aggressiveness, making it invisible or at least looking less brutal than it actually is (Galtung 1990). The analysis of the locality's recent history reveals additional facts. Over time, the locals' physical violence has been repeatedly exploited by political elites. Especially during Communism, violent mummers were co-opted for enforcing the agricultural cooperativization and for "convincing" the undecided ones to enter the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CAP) created by the Communist state.

Nevertheless, the picture of violence and of its promoters in Ruginoasa *comună* is more heterogeneous than unitary. It is dominated by the displacement of the *Mummers' Confrontation* from one village to another as a result of important social changes affecting the locality during the last century. Thus, the more rapid emancipation of the youngsters in Rediu village led to the battle's transfer from there to Dumbrăvița village where there have always been many young people working in agriculture and for which the mummers' confrontation has become a chance to be acknowledged and to gather social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Since 2004, under the influence of televisions that started to broadcast reports with recordings taken during the confrontation, this ritual has rather turned into a fight that had to be won at any price and any costs. The traditional ritual rules that used to govern the battle until that moment started to dissipate, and every year their place was taken by an increasing violence. The extreme aggressiveness at the end of 2011 required the intervention of state authorities that issued a local law forbidding the ritual. In this context, the mummers equipped for the battle got frustrated by the state's interference into a local problem, and transformed the ritual into a persiflage of state authorities and of the law enforcement meant to prevent the confrontation from taking place.

The main hypothesis underlying my research - and that was later confirmed by my interviewees' accounts - was that the battle of the mummers in the *comună* of Ruginoasa could not be separated from a ritual complex including two other important customs - *Malanca* and *Târâitul*. Just as the *Dance of the Goat* in Heleşteni, these rituals have to do with facilitating the relation between young people within a rural universe dominated by strong restrictive rules concerning premarital relations. Within this world, a series of customs such as the ones mentioned above were meant to create a formal framework accepted by the community and allowing the young ones to meet and communicate. Therefore, the existence of certain violent manhood rituals - such as *The Mummers' Battle with Clubs*, closely related to the customs facilitating premarital relations between young people such as *Malanca*, *Târâitul* and the *Dance of the Goat* - cannot be a surprise. The reason is that, during this type of confrontation, the young boys were able to prove their manliness and strength in the eyes of all the other villagers and especially of the young girls.

The detailed presentation of these rituals in Heleşteni and Ruginoasa proved that mummers had represented a way of responding to problems in the rural community, based on the rituals and rules of the local rural traditions. Along with the disintegration of the strict rules of rural communities and of the rural system of values under the pressure of several factors pertaining to global society, the role once performed by dying mummers was passed on to state institutions and organizations. During the last decades, these ones have taken over mummers' functions, serving in the meantime for the safeguarding of these forms of culture on the verge of extinction.

If in chapter two and three I use the classic methods of anthropology - such as interviews and participant observation - in chapter four I tried to see "over people's shoulder" and to read their culture not solely as a simple text (Geertz 1972:26), but also as a complicated writing that became clearer when it is read between the lines. This type of interpretation is useful when trying to analyze and understand mummers' plays as basic component of the system of values of the rural communities I studied. The rural system of values is neither visible, nor palpable; yet, it is always obvious in the villagers' actions, gestures and allusions. Precisely because of this, the anthropologist's eye and intuition, or the insider's experience is necessary in order to decipher all the meanings of this complex *mélange* of symbols and signs.

The accounts provided by those who knew well rural societies from the inside - important writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries like Władysław Reymont and Marin Preda - tell us about the peasants' system of values and mummers' plays from a perspective different of that promoted by Marxist and Economic Anthropology focused primarily on relations of production and on the idea of class struggle. From this larger and more complex perspective, mummers' plays represent a complex way of approaching certain problems that are inherent in the peasant universe, including premarital and erotic relations inside a world that did not allow for too many transgressions. In the meantime, such rituals with an obvious theatrical component also represent a chance to transcend the burdensome difficulties the rural community faced - such as illness, death, poverty, and social inequality - by means of irony and persiflage. All these elements speak about the diversity of aesthetic experiences of peasants and about the complexity of their social and cultural universe.

As opposed to the devaluation of peasants - a tradition deeply rooted in history (Drace-Francis 2013), there is another perspective focused on understanding their system of values and its relation to other aspects of rural culture, including mummers' plays. My life experience and the friendships I made with various locals of the rural world over time, as well as my participant observation during many years inside rural communities, proved me repeatedly that what might apparently seem absurd and aberrant in mummers' plays actually hides a universe of firm rules and principles imposed by the rural community. These rules and principles may be understood by first familiarizing with the peasants' system of values and comprehending their relation to mummers' plays. It is what I have done with my field research in Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, and especially when I tried to see over the people's shoulder towards the values animating them rather than to the statements they make at certain moments during debates or interviews.

Far from representing a parallel universe distanced from the principles and values of the rural community that created them, mummers' plays actually represent an important part of this system. They are strictly connected to the peasants' attitude towards work, family, dignity, social status, personhood and community; between all these, there are deep and complex relations that are not always easy to decipher. The close observation of mummers' rituals and their preparation shows there are behaviors considered to be inappropriate even during these customs, and they are being sanctioned by the rural community in various ways. Mummers' plays offer in fact an exceptional opportunity for the rural community to observe

the personality traits of its members, traits that are less easy to spot on other occasions or contexts.

From this perspective, far from being a reversal of the social order, mummers' plays are in fact an important part of the system of values in the rural world. This system has defined itself in time and expresses the human existence lived between the borders of societies based on agricultural work, where social life revolves around the village community. The history of these village communities is little known. Because of this, I called their inhabitants "people without history", borrowing one of Eric Wolf's metaphors. From the perspective of my research, peasants have for a long time been "people without history", and this has happened not because their "history has been denied" (Wolf 1990[1982]:23), but because over time this history had been ignored or concealed. The history of peasant communities includes the history of mummers' plays. Precisely because of this reason, an adequate knowledge of the evolution of mummers' plays over time could also shed more light on the rural universe in general - a universe "heavily laden with values" (Kluckhohn 1951:404). Mummers' plays are part of the rural system of values, and since this system is more persistent in time, it usually remains the last bastion of the rural communities facing the great transformations modern society and globalized world bring along. "Values are never immediately altered by a mere logical demonstration of their invalidity" (Kluckhohn 1951:400), Kluckhohn stated in his study on actions and values.

Being part of this complex set of rules, principles and values, mummers' plays and their practice speak about the vitality and dynamism of peasant communities; this happens while their absence or progressive disappearance in recent years mark the decay and decline of the rural values. Therefore, in understanding mummers' plays and their relation to the peasant system of values, theories dealing with limit situations, rules and moral principles, and their application proved adequate: Kant's theory on the sublime, Hartman's theory on good, and Kluckhohn's theory on values and action.

In the fifth chapter I speak extensively about the result of the confrontation between the peasants' system of values and the values of the capitalist global society, as well as about the fate of mummers' plays following the peasants' proletarianization and the transformation of the rural culture under the influence of industrialization. I open this chapter with a journey into the humanities literature about peasants, underlining the main influences that had left a mark on it. The large number of populations that had been named by a very general concept -

Peasant/Peasants - determined to a great extent the approach of this social reality, too. The questions about their economic and politic future, expressed from a Marxist perspective, represented the main concern of thinkers reflecting on this social class. Klaus Kautsky's work *On the Agrarian Question* (1899) was one of the most famous studies in this category, influencing even the local trends in Eastern European countries including Romania, too. In this Eastern European country, trends like *Poporanismul* (*being on people's side*), *Sămănătorismul* (*sowing ideas*) and *Țărănismul* (*Peasantism*) represented only some of the tendencies and disputes associated to understanding, defining and solving of the so-called *peasantry issue*.

Another research field attempting to understand peasantry was European Folkloristics. Based on the nationalist Romantic tradition, this science was also marked by ideological intrusions expressing the interest of political elites on peasantry. The idealized vision on peasants hindered understanding of peasants from the standpoint of the rituals they perform and of the cultural transmission of community customs such as the mummers' plays. European states' Folkloristics, mostly built behavior typologies, as well as typologies of social practice, rituals and peasant customs. Passing peasants' customs through the filter of the national ideology, Folkloristics marked them with autochthonism and included them in the broad category of national traditions (Neagota 2000).

Not only in Eastern Europe but also in countries like England (Ordish 1891), Ireland (Gailey 1969), Scotland (Buchan 1984), Sweden (Knuts 2007), Norway (Eike 2007), etc., Folkloristics initially tried to explain and define mummers' plays as surviving elements of eras long gone. The comparison of mummers nowadays to a series of rituals placed at huge geographic and historical distances (for instance, the mummers in 20<sup>th</sup> century England and other similar rituals practiced in ancient Greece or in the Carpathian space - such as *Călușarii*) was the main concern of the first thinkers analyzing these cultural forms. This tendency coming from the sphere of early sociocultural evolutionism inspired by Edward Tylor and Lewis Morgan is still present even today in the analysis of mummers' plays. From Thomas Fairman Ordish, the first thinker who approached this issue scientifically, to several contemporary thinkers who embraced the same perspective in recent works (for instance, Alan Brody 1969; Oișteanu 2012[1980]; Haja 2003, etc.) this trend has never completely disappeared in the research on mummers' plays.

Whereas most of these thinkers have seen mummers just as survivals from times gone by, still others described how mummers have faced the wave of changes brought by modernity. One of them was Horia Barbu Opreșan, a folklorist who became the witness of the transformations of folk plays in a time when peasantry in Romania was going through radical changes as a result of the massive industrialization process and of the large engineering projects meant to transform the agriculture implemented by the communist power (Opreșan 1987).

In my research, I point to a different way of approaching mummers' plays. Based on the works of authors who had analyzed human play from a cultural-historical perspective (Huizinga 1968[1938]), from the standpoint of the philosophy of language (Wittgenstein 2001[1953]) and of the philosophy of religions (Couliano 1992), I theorize mummers' plays as the expression of a cognitive architecture of the human mind (Liénard and Boyer 2006), built in close relationship with the culture, values and history of the community that produced them (Norbeck 1974; Malaby 2007). Wittgenstein argued that it would be impossible to produce a comprehensive concept that would include all human games and developed his concept of "family resemblances". This fact is explained by the extraordinary diversity and complexity of these games; in fact, they are the counterpart of the complexity and inventiveness of the human mind. "The human mind is fascinated by game because the mind recognizes in it its own functioning, and this recognition does not depend on the kind of game offered to the mind", Couliano states, too, reinforcing Wittgenstein's analysis (Couliano 1992:247).

The close comparison of the games shows us that in fact there are no content resemblances; instead, there are "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein 2001[1953]). Following Wittgenstein's path, I identify family resemblances in mummers' plays instead of content resemblances. Maybe that is the reason why many thinkers who tried to define and encompass human play under the umbrella of a comprehensive theory ended up by producing questionable taxonomies (Caillois 2001[1958], for instance). The same thing happened with authors who tried to circumscribe mummers' plays into a general concept or into a comprehensive theory. None of them could reach notable results (see for example Green 1978). Therefore, in order to understand a play and not to consider it absurd from the beginning, a way would be that of understanding "the form of life" that had produced it (Wittgenstein 2001[1953]). However, what Wittgenstein calls form of life, the anthropologists call culture, and I call cultural micro-ecosystem. I used this concept

considering that it is more relevant in understanding the relation between human culture, mummers' plays (as well as other plays in general) and human consciousness.

With the emergence of capitalism and the encompassing of rural communities into a different economic and social cycle, mummers' plays started to vanish rapidly. For a while, these peasant rituals adapted to the emerging workers' culture that was also made of cohesive communities. Mummers' plays have rather turned into a rush for money or a brutal intrusion against the firm rules of urban cohabitation than into a carol with deep meanings for the community (Nissenbaum 1996). However, as Huizinga observed, the play element in human societies has been gradually eliminated or severely diminished by the development of sport competitions, an attitude that capitalist society (Huizinga 1968[1938]) and more recently the advertisement culture encouraged (Sartori 2005[1997]). With the advent of television and then of the internet, the ritual element in play, marked by a clear date of the performance and by the crossing of certain stages by the performers, disappeared. Together with them, the barrier that limited the individual's access to play anywhere and anytime vanished, too.

All these elements created problems for individuals in modern societies, atomized and left alone with their consciousness. Separated from the community that *brew* the play and from the ritual that limited its access to ritual anytime and anywhere, the individual also turned into the play's prey. Mummers' plays made people, even small children, interact with each other, and determined them to create ties with each other. Through mummers' plays people created groups based on friendship, solidarity, and co-operation. Well, this is not the case regarding television, Internet, and especially video games. Unlike mummers' plays, all these expressions of modernity can lead to isolation, atomization, and individualism. This is because they can be consumed without the presence and without the involvement of other people. Step by step, television, video games and virtual communities replaced the rural culture where, by playing, the individual communicated a whole range of experiences and inner feelings to the others (Bruckner 2007[1995]:69; Sartori 2005[1997]:11). Revolving more and more around the individual self, the human being of the modern capitalist society may become the game's prisoner. Thus, the person no longer communicates inner feelings to the community by performing the play, but by transmitting them to a virtual reality that leads itself to mechanic, prefabricated and stereotypical responses. Thus, a great deal of the human creativity and interaction that used to be involved in the performance of mummers' plays and also of other plays connected to the human community and the relationships within it, is being erased.



In chapter Six I focus on the role of national ideology in the history of mummers' plays. Using Romania as a case study, I describe how national state attempted to appropriate mummers' plays. This strategy was applied because the mummers' plays, symbols and manifestations sounded appealing to the large masses of peasant or recently proletarianized peasant population. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century state cultural institutions have attempted to festivalize various folk plays teams by bringing them onstage in folklore festivals, with the purpose of patrimonialize them. The situation was justified by the need to safeguard these forms of culture that had become increasingly threatened by extinction during the modernization of the Romanian society. In fact, the interest of the national state trying to appropriate the peasant rituals by means of a national ideology of Romantic inspiration was often hidden behind the patrimonialization attempts. In this ideology, folk plays represented an identity mark of Romanian people and an evidence of their continuity on a given geographic territory.

With the arrival of communism to power, the attempts of appropriating folk plays were first done by separating from their complex reality just those elements that matched with the rigid marxist-leninist doctrine of the first two decades of Romanian communism (Vasile 2013). Especially in villages where mummers' plays were alive and dynamic, their performers were asked to contact the local authorities who would issue a special certificate granting people the right to carol around the village. This was also a way of controlling the peasants' spontaneous creation, as well as a way of supervising the manifestations of the rural oral culture by means of the state and party institutions and organizations. In the meantime, *Mișcarea Artistică de Amatori/The Amateur Artistic Movement* was created. It was an organization with divisions in all rural localities, where folk creations such as carols, rituals and dances had to be supervised by the movement's members and revised in respect of the official communist ideology (Georgescu 1959).

Nevertheless, the most assiduous attempts at appropriating mummers' plays were done during the neo-patrimonial dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu. By developing the cult of his own personality and by using state institutions, Ceaușescu tried to use all these cultural-symbolic elements that would appeal to the large population masses. The attention of the communist leader and of his ideologues was also directed towards mummers' plays since these ones had the privilege of being considered forms of secular culture, and thus matched the nationalist-communist ideology of atheist inspiration that was promoted during those times. Controlling all forms of culture was one of the objectives of Ceaușescu's regime. With

the *July 1971 Theses*, and especially with the opening of the *National Festival Cântarea României/ Song (of Praise) to Romania*, there was an attempt at seizing all those forms of creation with a symbolic and imaginary content that could be understood or perceived by folk masses. Mummers' plays belonged to this category, especially with the *Dance of the Deer* which was promoted both in the *National Festival Cântarea României* and in the magazines endorsing the agenda of the Romanian Communist Party such as the *Romania* and the *Picturesque Romania* magazine. This aggressive appropriation of the mummers' plays was through a significant transformation of it, as resulting from various interviews with the team members who had joined the gigantic festival called *Cântarea României*. Still, this type of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2008) by which a part of the human spirit's freedom would be hindered was not a new phenomenon in the history of human civilization; there was a long history behind it. As shown by recent archaeological discoveries, it goes back to the dawn of human civilization, a few thousand years ago (Wengrow 2001).

The last chapter of the dissertation focuses on the postsocialist period and on patrimonialization policies implemented during the last two and half decades. Unlike previous century, during postsocialism in Romania peasantry was increasingly integrated in the circuit of market economy, consumer's culture, agricultural corporatization, but also in the always wider spiral of transnational labor migration. However, all these phenomena did not only affect the peasantry of the ex-communist countries, but also that from nations in Africa, Asia and South America (Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij 2000). The analysis of these realities made some researchers speak about *global depeasantization* (Araghi 1995; McMichael 2012), *global deagrarianization* (Bryceson 1996) and even about the *death of peasantry* (Hobsbawm 1994).

This was the equivalent of a gradual but significant change not only in the rural economy and society, but also in the peasant system of values. Exploring rural realities in postsocialist Romania, Katherine Verdery (2003) and Katy Fox (2011) referred explicitly to the transformation of peasant values under the pressure of the important political, economic and legislative changes after 1989. Verdery analyzed these changes relating them to the new legislation on agricultural field properties, and paid attention to transformations in terms of status, dignity, work, autonomy, and mastery resulting from the devaluation of land as an asset. In her turn, Fox also spoke about the reconfiguration of peasants' values as a result of implementing the new legislation of the European Union regarding the production and marketing of alimentary agricultural goods by small peasant households. So, rigorous field

research about the depeasantization process could not neglect the fact that profound changes in the rural world do not only take place at economic, political and legislative level, but also at the system of values level of small-scale agricultural communities. These transformations are the product and the result of the interaction between multiple factors, including the relation of individuals to the social, economic and cultural realities of globalization.

Of all these phenomena and interactions, my present research focuses especially on labor migration to Western European countries because its effects were the most visible in the community's relation to its oral traditions, including mummers' plays, too. Transnational labor migration especially affected the younger and active segment of population, precisely the generation meant to transmit the oral traditions of rural communities. My photo elicitation and writing essay events with primary school pupils in Heleşteni showed not only these young people love for local traditions but also their aspirations that are strongly connected to getting a good job in a city and migrating in a western European country.

In Eastern Europe, the gates were opened for this migration right after the fall of the *Iron Curtain* in 1989, leading to the creation of new identities based on values distinct from those of previous generations. While young people think of migrating, many elders embrace new Christian denominations in search of a set of more rigorous moral principles and values closer to those extant in the peasant societies when they were young. These both trends lead to a downfall of mummers' plays and other local rituals, as young people are no present in the villages anymore and the elders don't receive the carolers because of new religious dogmas they embraced. These processes inevitably lead to the dissipation of the customary communities, which have been the source of creating and maintaining mummers' plays for generations in a row.

Consequently, along with the progressive disappearance of that peasantry revolving around customary communities, a new kind of peasant and a new type of peasantry have appeared in the context of globalization. Kearney speaks about the transnational migrant peasant, always travelling between different countries and regions, caught between a job benefitting large transnational companies and performing a subsistence agricultural task in the small household he or she own in the native country (Kearney 1996). More recently, this new social category was well described by Van der Ploeg with his concept of *The New Peasantries* (Ploeg 2009).

However, rituals like mummers' plays belong to the culture of the old peasantry which was organized around customary communities and their values; in Europe, only few islands of this peasantry still exist, and they diminish day by day; the same happens on other continents - Africa, Asia, South America - where it used to represent the most numerous population until not so long ago. Inevitably, the phenomenon of extinction of the old rural customary communities also means that their traditions - mummers' plays included - disappear.

Under these circumstances, at least in Romania, safeguarding peasant rituals and other forms of peasant culture menaced by a gradual process of disintegration has become a priority for folklorists, ethnologists, local politicians, journalists and entrepreneurs. With roots in the rural world, all of them are nostalgic and regretful about the extinction of rural traditions. Yet, the most widespread form the phenomenon of post-December 1989 patrimonialization was inherited from communism: the exportation of rural traditions on the stages of folk festivals taking place in large urban centers of the county where rural culture was still strong due to the large mass of proletarianized peasants created during Communism. Thus, by means of three processes obvious within these festivals - *festivalization*, *urbanization*, *mass-mediating* -, the rural oral culture of which mummers' plays are an important part, started to be exported more frequently outside the borders of the customary community that had begotten it. Having the opportunity to join some of these festivals with the *Deer* team of Heleşteni *comună*, I had the chance to observe closely the changes these customs undergo once they had to obey the strict rules imposed by the festivals, and especially the capitalist competition rules based on juries and evaluations (Cash 2011). The reason was that being onstage also meant an implicit confrontation with other teams in order to obtain the prizes offered by the organizing city halls and the festivals' sponsors.

The last such festival I joined took place in Cernăuți, Ukraine. Following the team of the *Deer* in Heleşteni, on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2017 I reached the overcrowded streets of this town in southern Ukraine. Since 2011, in the beginning of January, an international folk festival called *Malanka-Fest* takes place in Cernăuți. This is one of the largest folk festivals in Eastern Europe and also the largest one I have ever witnessed. Conceived as a parade of the participant teams along the city streets, on huge platforms placed on cars, *the Malancas' festival* immediately made me think of *The Carnival of Rio de Janeiro* and *Mummers' Parade in Philadelphia*. In fact, what I had witnessed on the streets of Cernăuți was a *Rio* of Eastern Europe.

Folk themes from Ion Creangă's stories - such as *Punguța cu doi bani* - and representations of *St. Melania* who is believed to have given the name of *Malanca*, could be noticed by the eye of an Eastern European folklore connoisseur. Besides, Ukrainian teams of *Malanca* from villages and *raioane/districts* neighboring Cernăuți could be seen next to the Romanian teams of the *Dance of the Deer* and *Dance of the Goat*. All these were agglutinated together with more recent topics, in order to form a heterogeneous and multicolored mass where traditional culture has turned into a mere part of the immense global soup. An explanation is that, besides the rural themes mentioned, I also saw monsters, Franksteins, devils, dragons, "strippers", "Russian soldiers" satirized as demons, Egyptian pharaohs, a huge Trojan Horse, Santas, and cheerleaders of American inspiration. Last but not least, I could even glimpse "Charlie Chaplin" and "Donald Trump" among the participants. Obviously, it was an unexpected meeting between the capitalist cultural industry (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002[1944]) and the rural traditional culture escaped into the realm of show and entertainment.

As researcher of the rural culture, the entire show represented for me a sort of urbanization of traditions, but also a form of exporting them to the world of entertainment, show, mass consumerism, and global tourism. All these realities constitute a topic long debated in heritage studies (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007). Bringing rural traditions onstage or at urban parades like the one in Cernăuți represented a substantial transformation of them under the burden of power relations marking even today the distinction between rural and urban. Tourists coming to Cernăuți to attend this festival can no longer distinguish the tumultuous political history of mummers' plays being rather in search of cheap entertainment. Exoticization of rural culture, only to be consumed later, is a departure from the true spirit of these rituals that can only be discovered through an incursion into the world of the villages where they come from. Thus, instead of a useful patrimonialization in the spirit of community values that created them, festivals such as the one from Cernăuți represent perfect embodiments of the concept of cultural industry.

Just as the peasant migrants from Heleşteni and Ruginoasa whom I had the chance to listen to, rural oral culture itself has taken the shape of the exodus towards urban centers in Romania and outside the country's borders. In fact, these urban centers are appealing because they possess many attractions but also much more financial capital, and this capital is more accessible than in the narrow world of the village. Walking along the streets of Cernăuți - that day a city with a colorful crowd armed with iPhones, video and photo cameras - with the

*Deer* team in Heleşteni, I was able to notice better than anywhere else the phenomenon of transition of mummers' plays from community rituals to transnational intangible cultural heritage. All these things are possible in a capitalist, market-driven world where information flows very quickly and is consumed by the public oblivious to the history of the mummers' plays and the communities that begot them. The continuous shooting of *Deer* team members in Heleşteni by tourists with i-phones from Cernăuți is not a form of genuine interest toward peasant culture but an effect of exoticization of rural culture, which in this case became only a consumer object. This type of behavior has been observed by anthropologists in other cultural contexts and situations (O'Rourke 1988).

Nevertheless, at the same time globalization brings more valuable forms of patrimonialization than those implemented through state institutions. Lovers of rural traditions meet more and more often in the virtual space of the internet, on sites like Facebook and YouTube to make their local culture known and share ideas about it. Last but not least, the peasants' sons and daughters, dispersed through migration in all major urban centers and across the planet, make known the culture of the mummers they lived in during childhood, in the most unexpected places and situations, through their life stories. They may become unexpected agents of a type of patrimonialization much more efficient and genuine than the one implemented through national and international official safeguarding institutions.

This final stage of my field research has been presented as a symbolic end of the short history of mummers' plays that I included in the pages of this study. This history is not only a history of mummers. I always struggled to look behind mummers' masks to the human beings who practice them. They were able to transmit me a fragment of the complex array of manifestations that render us human like feelings, anxieties, hopes, dilemmas, and needs. Violence, hatred and brutality are not absent from this array, but one may also find innocence, love, attachment to people, values and community there.

## CHAPTER I

### ENCOUNTERING THE FIELD

#### A. Starting a new field research

When I started my first field research as a graduate student in anthropology at UMass Amherst, I was lucky to have already had eight years of field experience in Romania and mainly in Romanian countryside. During previous years, I had conducted an extensive field research on mining culture in southern Transylvania and in different countryside locations in Romania, together with my colleagues and friends from *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica* of Cluj-Napoca. This small association was set up in 2004 by Bogdan Neagota, a professor at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, in the Philology Department and was comprised of a diverse group of graduate students in Humanities, cameramen and folklore lovers. We were all unhappy with the corruption and lack of opportunities for anthropological research in the Romanian educational and academic system, and had experienced our own rancor against Romania's eternal transition towards democracy and market economy. This was how we decided to help each other instead of uselessly applying for funds and sources from a system we distrusted and disliked. Together with these colleagues, I was involved in a series of longitudinal field research on Romanian peasants' traditions, rituals and ceremonies. What drew all of us towards the study of peasantry was a combination of 'Romantic sensibilities' towards the different 'Other', the 'modern nationalist imagination' (Kearney 1996:1), and the common observation that peasant societies are caught today in a torrent of transformations that will change once and forever - and probably very fast - the face of Romanian rural culture.

In spite of this experience and insight, I was not at all less anxious when I stepped for the first time in Moldova, the eastern region of Romania, where I decided to conduct my first field research for my Ph.D. thesis at UMass Amherst. This was not only because I was about to step for the first time in a new field and a region totally unknown to me, but also because of the violence involved in the ritual I had chosen to study, as well as the controversial nature of the topic.

One year before starting my Ph.D. program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, some nationwide TV channels such as ProTV and Antena 1 had broadcasted a rural ritual held in Ruginoasa *comună*, Iaşi county. The ritual was presented as: "the traditional

battle of the masked people” or “the traditional battle with clubs”. I had the chance to watch the short reports broadcasted by ProTV channel, and I saw two groups of young peasants masked with heavy hats made out of sheep fur, armed with long and hard wooden sticks, hitting each other in a kind of chaotic brawl where sometimes some were hospitalized with wounded heads or broken limbs. The fight did not last more than five minutes on the morning of December 31<sup>st</sup>, but its spectacular character caught the attention of many viewers, including some of my friends and relatives whom I heard remarking: “Have you seen the battle of the masked people in Ruginoasa? That's a ritual really like back then in ancient times!” Most probably, such comments were not only the result of watching the primitive nature of the fight and the barbarian-like masks, but also of the way national TVs were wrapping the fight in order to display it as “a millenary tradition of the Romanian people”.

Several months afterwards, by the end of 2008, I had the opportunity to watch another broadcast - actually a series of thirty-minute long documentaries - produced this time by the Romanian National TV – TVR1, and called *Zestrea Românilor*. In Romanian, the word *zestre* is a homonym with two meanings: *dowry* and *inheritance*, both of which send us to the idea of heritage. The series mentioned above used to present several peasant rituals including handicrafts, food making, the pig slaughter on December 20<sup>th</sup> and winter folk plays. This time, the visual message and the main idea of the comments were packed inside a sort of nationalistic mythology where the customs were described as coming from “beyond history” and “across time” where “authentic Romanian people may be found”. The peasants performing all these *traditions* wore folk costumes, and the atmosphere created around them was one of timeless innocence and kindness, with people leading a simple, yet authentic and spiritual life, far away from the hardship and daily agitation of the postsocialist transition to a market economy.

One of these series was presented the *Dance of the Deer* in Cucuteni village, Iași county, one of the most fascinating performance in the folk play category. The folk artists - a compact group of men - were all wearing the same traditional homemade clothes, and performed their dance on a meadow covered in fresh snow. While the team was performing their play, a narrator explained in a gentle tone and voice that *the Deer* was an ancient symbol of purity and innocence deeply rooted in ancient civilizations like that of the Celtic people, a symbol orally transmitted ever since and still preserved as an ancient vestige in rituals like the *Dance of the Deer* from Cucuteni village.



The warm, yet emphatic comments of the narrator and the mythological-nationalistic wrap in which this ritual had been packed did not impress me too much. Still, the image of the *dancing Deer* did awake in my soul a very old memory from my childhood that seemed to have been lurking in a corner of my mind. I must have been not older than five years when this happened. It was around New Year's Eve. I still remember our decorated Christmas tree and the special time around New Year when the Romanian National TV broadcasted fancy shows instead of the boring daily two-hours Communist Party propaganda. I heard a loud drumming noise at our door, and I ran to see what was happening. My father called me to come and see the *Goat*. I was expecting to see a real goat, and I was very curious about it. Instead, I saw something that was beyond my imagination. There was a goat-like “creature” totally covered in a kind of rug with dozens of decorations and colorful tassels on it, and a wooden jaw that clattered rhythmically. And above that, the jaw was wrapped in a kind of red velvet and, at regular intervals, a red tongue made of the same red material came out of the big wooden mask. I was totally mesmerized by the creature, and I felt both fear and attraction towards it. In my imagination, the *goat* became a real living being that was off of the fairy-tales or fantastic novels my parents would indulge me with almost every night before I fell asleep. That was why when the goat approached me, I ran like crazy to the other room.

My father tried to encourage me and, taking me to his arms, brought me back there. “Don’t be afraid, it is our neighbor, Ștefanel!” Indeed, from under the cover of the goat, a teenager, just ten years older than me, whom I used to play with sometimes, came out with his face all sweat. That moment, the creature lost a part of its magic, but the impression it produced had been extremely powerful, that I still remember it after so many years. I could not recount seeing the *Goat* on our door afterwards, but many times I saw these teams on the streets of my city around Christmas and New Year. Back then, I had no idea how and why these *Goats* came to my small industrial city called Vulcan. Many years later, I realized that these kind of theatrical representations were brought by peasant workers in Vulcan, a town situated in southern Transylvania’s Jiu Valley area, the most important coal exploitation area in Romania during communism. The peasants came from the region of Moldova to work in the coal industry where they had the chance to earn much more money than working in their villages at the local state farms, or in their neighboring cities. Thus, coming to the Jiu Valley, they brought along not only their belongings from countryside, but also their values and rituals.

Probably it was one of the reasons why these TV broadcasts awakened a kind of longing for home in my emigrant soul, as a person who had been living for a while in the United States. On the other hand, apart from these nostalgic memories of my early childhood while watching these broadcasts, my background as an experienced cameramen and my anthropological nose told me that behind the entire series there was the hand of a skillful film director, and that the field reality of the Moldavian villages might be totally different. In fact, all the documentaries of the series may be regarded as a heritagisation effort to build a canon of nationalistic mythology where peasants were conceived as a reservoir of traditions and spirituality rooted in the ancient origin of the Romanian people.

Cucuteni village where the *Dance of the Deer* was filmed is a locality situated just 25 kilometers away from Ruginoasa *comună*, where the *Battle with Clubs* used to take place every year on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Both these end of the year rituals had fascinated and attracted me, and my experience as an anthropologist told me I could find something completely different if I scrutinized them more thoroughly and had the chance to strip them of their magic and mythological aura that some television directors and reporters with nationalistic views had given them. These were my thoughts when I decided to go to Ruginoasa-Cucuteni area to analyze these customs more thoroughly. When I left Boston to get a closer look at these winter rituals, my feelings were a mix of impatience and anxiety before meeting a new research field that I had not known before and that I thought probably hid some secrets and mysteries that I needed to learn before proceeding to study them.

## **B. Preparing for the Field**

I arrived in Bucharest on December 29<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon. My uncle, was waiting for me at the airport and brought me to his home. His apartment was situated in a ten-floor apartment building located in a good area of Bucharest, dominated by constructions and apartment complexes made during communist times mainly for the working class in the capital. In 2009, two decades after the 1989 Revolution, as the city had been expanding and the new social inequalities were growing, new luxury apartments and houses started to show up in some other areas of Bucharest. The apartment complexes build during communism began to be considered outdated, while the people inhabiting them - most of them ex-workers in communist factories, now retired - were regarded as being part of the capital's low-middle class.

As soon as I got there, we started a conversation about my field interest, and I told him and his wife that I was planning to go and film the “battle of the masked people” in Ruginoasa the next day in the morning. Both of them confessed me they were excited and looking forward to watching the news on the Ruginoasa battle. They also let me know they had been watching it every year on December 31<sup>st</sup>, during the past few years. They also characterized the battle as “an interesting ancient tradition”, although sometimes too violent. This kind of already common characterization of Ruginoasa’s battle with clubs as “ancient tradition” or “millenary tradition” reminded me one of Eric Hobsbawm’s statements: “’Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (E. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Indeed, the discourse of the ordinary people, marked by mass-media influences, and the nonchalance with which they used terms like “ancient”, “ancestral” or “millenary” to characterize Ruginoasa’s battle, made me feel a bit skeptical regarding the “ancient” origin of this rural ritual, and challenged me to reflect on it from a Hobsbawmian perspective.

During the next hours, I chatted with my uncle about the latest news in Romania, and he began complaining about the difficulties of day-to-day life, railing mainly against Romanian corrupt politicians “who do nothing good for the country or people, and only follow their own interests”. Corruption has become a favorite topic of ordinary people after the collapse of communism, and the political leaders of the country were often blamed for the weakness and disarray of the Romanian society.

At around 7:00 p.m., while talking about daily life in Romania and also about politics, we heard big noises and screams coming from the corridor of the building. We both got scared and went outside to see what had happened. An old lady, a neighbor of my uncle, was screaming like crazy and begged us to help her. We did not know what had happened, but her door was open and we saw jets of water coming out of the heating installation. The water was incredibly hot, and the poor women did not know what to do. While I tried to help her block the hole in the radiator with some rags, my uncle ran to the basement of the building to shut off the water of the entire ten-floor building. In order to do this, he needed the help of some of the other neighbors, and they were unsuccessful for at least 20-30 minutes, long enough for the water to go through most of the apartments in the lower levels of the apartment block. Both the old lady and I were ineffectual in stopping the hot water from pouring out during all that time. She was continuously crying and lamenting that she “has destroyed her neighbors’ apartments on the lower floors right before the New Year”.

Many other neighbors came around trying to calm her down as most of them were afraid she would have a heart attack or a psychological breakdown. I was impressed at how all of the neighbors came together like a community to help calm down the old lady in need. But one neighbor, actually the one who had stopped the water together with my uncle, dared to make a cutting remark: “What do you expect if you buy cheap plastic pipes for your heating installation?” “What can we do?” replied another neighbor, “We have no money! These people from the government are killing us! And we have all worked hard our entire lives!” “That’s true!” agreed the first man. After helping the old lady remove the water from the house, all of us went back to our apartments. My uncle and I were completely wet and had to change all our clothes. The day ended with a discussion between me, my uncle and my aunt about poverty and social inequalities in postsocialist Romania, where again the politicians and the new economic elite of the country were the ones to blame.

### **C. A “Regular” Winter Day in Bucharest**

The next morning, I was waiting for one of my friends - a member of the *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica Association* - to come to Bucharest and accompany me to the field work site in the eastern part of Romania known as Moldavia. This friend of mine, who was back then an undergraduate student in Ethnology at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, and also working as an electrician for a state company, had come from 400 kilometers away and had travelled the whole night by train. Only their passion for anthropology and ethnology led the members of this association in their common research interests and purposes, as there were no other rewards for their work and efforts.

When my friend met my uncle, right after being introduced to one another, they started a discussion about the politics and the current situation of the country. In the meantime, my aunt started preparing breakfast. While going to give her a helping hand, I already heard the two men - who thirty minutes before did not know each other at all - making critical remarks directed against Romanian politicians and chatting as if they were old friends. While this kind of discussions about Romanian politics, corruption and the wretched state of the economy seem bitter and full of passion and rancor, they embody at the same time a different aspect that is less visible at a first sight. They give to the ordinary people and mostly to those who had become impoverished during the transition from state socialism to capitalism, a common sense of solidarity and the feeling of belonging to the same destiny; these features make them similar in spite of the cultural or intellectual

differences between them. More than that, these discussions help ordinary people create bonds with each other in a social, economic and political climate that is tense and insecure.

Soon enough, the discussion reached the point where both men agreed that “only someone like Vlad the Impaler could save the country and bring it on the right track”. In Romania, many people talk in terms and concepts such as: “right for the country,” “state of normalcy,” “justice,” as well as their opposites: “bad for the country,” “abnormal state,” and “injustice”. All of these terms are frequently on people’s lips and remind me of how powerful the nationalistic ideology has been in the country's recent past, a fact well observed and analyzed by both autochthonous (Boia 2001) and western historians and anthropologists (Verdery 1991). The main topics and themes of the discussion I had heard - for example, the continuous references to a long-delayed “state of normalcy” in the country - were quite common for Romanian postsocialist space, and they were also identified in some other countries and areas that used to be part of the former Eastern Bloc (Creed 2010:1; Galbraith 2015:150).

In Romania, after the collapse of communism, this kind of discussion between people, strangers and friends alike, whether at home or in public places like pubs, buses, trains or in the street, has become a common occurrence. These terms have turned into an important part of Romanian mainstream culture and have become an easy way for ordinary people to discharge their anger and dissatisfaction in “the public space”. At the same time, these discussions help people create an illusion precious to themselves: that of participating in the public and political life of the country or, as most of the people believe and briefly summarize, that of “making politics”. It is perhaps interesting to mention that the discussion between my uncle and my friend happened around 6:00 a.m. With just a few brief breaks while eating, they continued talking until about 9:00 a.m. when we were supposed to leave and pick up a car that I had booked online from a rental car agency.

Fortunately, the headquarters of the rental company were just two blocks away, or at least that was what we were expecting. When we got to the address I had written down and where I was supposed to pick the car, we realized it was just a regular apartment in a ten-floor building. The people living there had no idea about any car rental company located in their building. That moment, I was sure I had been the victim of a scam and the car rental company I had chosen did not even exist. I began to think seriously about whether I had any real chances of renting another car just a day before New Year’s Eve. I was already thinking

about what I could do in the worst-case scenario, namely if I found no other car to rent. The next day was December 31<sup>st</sup> and, around 6:00 a.m., the *Traditional Fight with Clubs* in Ruginoasa *comună*, Iași County, was supposed to take place. The village was more than 450 kilometers away, which meant at least seven hours of driving on Romanian crowded roads. But that exact moment, the trip seemed to be just a remote dream. Coming back from the “rental company”, I started watching more carefully the social landscape of the capital and I was thinking that maybe I could start my ethnographic project right there.

Looking around Bucharest streets, I had already seen many carolers of the coming event - New Year's Eve - dressed in their easily identifiable clothes. Some of these itinerant artists wore bear furs as costumes, while “their masters” were cracking long whips that made a lot of noise. They were performing their pieces under people's windows or right in front of the supermarkets. I saw people in their balconies throwing money packed in matchboxes to these rural-urban “carolers.” One of the performers would pick up the money and thank them while the rest of the men went on playing. They continued to walk further along in front of other windows to garner attention. I asked some of them where they had come from and they said they came from Moldavia. Some other “carolers”, especially gypsy children, were carrying lambs or small baby goats in their arms, and kept telling passers-by that they could touch the animal head and give the owner some money in exchange. It was believed that any person willing to do this ritual, would certainly secure his or her good luck for the entire next year. I asked some of the lamb carriers what kind of custom this was as I had never heard of it. Unfortunately, all I got back were just brief answer: “a tradition”. The lamb owners did not have too much time for discussions as they were running to get more “customers” interested in increasing their luck by the power of this tradition. I thought I should give myself a chance with the “tradition” and I petted the head of a baby goat, an action that cost me three lei (\$0.75) happily accepted by a poor child. While patting the baby goat, I was involuntary thinking I might get lucky with the rented car and with my new research, too.

What stroke me about the meeting with the lamb and kid carriers was the easiness in their use of the term “tradition” in order to get money from passers-by who seemed to be happy faced with the chance of taking part in this “tradition”. Besides this, I noticed that the *Bear* dancers around referred to their performance with the words “folk custom” and “tradition”, too. It looked as if most of the itinerant artists I met, just like many of my interviewees during my previous research, used the words *tradition*, *custom* and *ritual* quite indistinctly when talking about these performances. For all of them, it seemed to have the

same meaning: a repetitive action performed according to a kind of artistic scenario rooted in the countryside culture.

It is the word *tradition* that resonates stronger with people's consciousness in a country like Romania. During the last two decades of the communist period, the Romanian communist system used this word in a propagandistic manner to prove Romanians' continuity "for thousands of years on the territory between the Danube River, the Prut River and the Carpathian Mountains". After 1989, during a painful transition towards a market economy, agitation and uncertainty became an everyday reality. The collapse of many factories, as well as the more mobile economic and political relations, caught people unprepared after a 45-year period of communism when the state had been the main provider in fulfilling people's needs, and also a guarantor of social stability. All these social and economic realities made ordinary people feel alienated, unprotected and left at the mercy of the blind forces of history. Within this troubled landscape, Romanian traditions have begun to be approached as an oasis of stability in a mobile global world where changes, economic crises and unforeseeable events were common occurrences. In a society with a strong rural background such as Romania, traditions were perceived and designed - even in several mass-media broadcasts - as remnants of a more stable past when life was better, people were less greedy and hateful, and the political leaders were on the side of the common people, fighting for the justice and rights of the poor just as Vlad the Impaler is supposed to have done in the past.

In such a social environment, the itinerant artists performing their "traditional" sketches on the streets and the children asking for money with lambs and kids in their arms, have actually chosen a good strategy. I attempted at making some calculations by observing how much and how often people gave money to street performers. According to these calculations, a child performing this activity may easily earn at least \$50 per day, a sum of money exceeding the daily salaries of most Romanian factory workers, teachers, resident physicians and even engineers.

For people who offered money to these carolers, this was a way of supporting "our traditions", namely the customs with their roots in the 'remote past of rural world'. Many of Bucharest's inhabitants had emigrated there from the countryside during the communist era when the country was strongly industrialized and the continuous development of heavy industry needed many workers. The peasants migrating to the capital from different corners of the country's rural areas, became workers in a short while. With some of them completely

uprooted during communism, the bands of *Bears*, *Deers* and *Goats* dancing under their windows, as well as the children with their lambs in arms, ignited some of the warmest memories of a childhood when they, too, used to wear the same colorful costumes and to perform the same dances and rituals in their villages. These thoughts of mine were partly confirmed by an unexpected meeting. As we entered my uncle's apartment building, one of his neighbors told us: "Do you see all these boys (referring to the carolers wearing bear coats)? When I was a teenager, I used to carol throughout my entire village, day in and day out, when the New Year's Eve was approaching!" My uncle confirmed and added that in his village, it was the same when he was young. Nevertheless, the situation raised a question for me: were the itinerant artists that we saw on the streets the very same kind of carolers who used to perform in smaller villages where everybody knew them since they belonged to the rural community, or are we also talking about two totally different kinds of situations and traditions?

With this question in mind, I went back into the apartment, and I looked through my car rental papers where I finally found the company's phone number. I called, no one answered, so I dialed a cell phone number also listed on the same paper, and a man answered. He said he was not in the office that moment, and that I should call back in two or three hours when he would be there. I desperately told him that I was supposed to leave by that time, and managed to convince him that I needed to talk to somebody who was in the office. He gave me another number that I called immediately and so I was able to summarize my story of having the wrong address of the agency. The person on the phone replied he had no idea how I had gotten the wrong address, and gave me the company's real address. He mentioned that my name was in their database with a car reserved in their parking lot. The car was supposed to be picked up in an hour as the company had to close earlier, since it was the day before New Year's Eve. I suddenly felt a bit better. I hurriedly told my uncle the real address of the company and he burst into laughter. "I hope you are not joking! One hour from here to there? This is almost impossible!" "Why, it is only about 15-20 kilometers," I replied. "It's obvious you are not from Bucharest! Going that direction, you have to cross a bridge. On that bridge people sometimes wait even for hours caught in traffic jams!" Needless to say, we left in a hurry. I took a look at my uncle who was really nervous. However, we were lucky to find almost no cars on the bridge. "It must have been the baby goat", I told my uncle and my friend, when we were only two streets away from the car rental company! They were both laughing and encouraged me to try that trick more often.



Thus we arrived without any problems at the headquarters of the rental company, 10 minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. I was expecting to find a small Chevrolet as mentioned in the papers; instead, the workers brought me a Matiz, which is a small Korean car made in Romania. They told me that because New Year's Eve was approaching, they had already rented most of their cars, and the Matiz was the only one left in that category, so, if I refused that particular car, I would not have another chance to rent one until after the New Year. In the face of such an argument, I “happily” accepted.

As I started to drive towards our destination, I began to think about everything I had seen in the last two days: the incident with the broken pipe in the old lady’s apartment, the discussion between my uncle and my friend, the carols in the Bucharest streets, the incident with the rental car company, the poor state of the roads, and so on. All of these things spoke volumes about the high level of structural violence in the Romanian postsocialist society, combined with the strong connection and affiliation between the urban and the rural worlds.

#### **D. My Landing in the Moldavian Countryside**

Driving to Ruginoasa village was not easy. I had never driven before in that part of the country, and neither my friend, nor I knew the roads. We had already started to think about where we would sleep that night. Such discussions were common among the members of *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica* during their field trips. Having little funding, often investing their own money or sometimes securing a small grant in their audio and video equipment, it was common for the researchers to ask for accommodation from mayors and authorities in the villages, and sometimes even from village inhabitants. In exchange for their hospitality, people were often given a DVD of the rituals they had participated in and that had been filmed by us. Usually everybody was happy with this kind of barter exchange, but not everyone was always so hospitable.

Sometimes there was simply not enough time for the researchers to build up a trustworthy relationship with the people and to create confidence. Because of this, it was not unusual for some members of *Orma* to sleep inside their cars even during wintertime or on the floor of an unheated school or town building. That December day, we knew we had to arrive at our destination before dark, so that we would have the chance to find a cheap accommodation, and to film the ritual the next morning at 5:00 am. Indeed, after a long tiring

trip, we arrived around 9:00 p.m. in Ruginoasa. We stopped downtown in the locality that looked much bigger than I expected.

I knew little about Ruginoasa when I started my research there and it seemed I had been misled by TV programs that broadcasted the battle and wrapped it in a package where barbaric ancestry and “the real peasant holders of ancient traditions” blended in creating the portrait of the fighters. For this reason, I had somehow expected a small village isolated on a hill, a remote *comună* far away from the main car roads or something similar. I had this representation in mind in spite of the fact that I knew this locality had been the residency of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, prince of Moldavia and ruler whose name was linked to the union of Moldova and Walachia in 1859. I was even more surprised to find out that the battle ritual would take place not far away from the main road that crossed the locality and connected two important cities in Iași county: Târgu Frumos and Pașcani. Ruginoasa’s downtown was close to that road was in fact.

In Ruginoasa’s downtown there was a large square. Two pubs were on the parallel sides of the square, and on the other side stood the building of the railway station. The carriageway paralleled the railway and bordered the square on the other side of the station, while just behind the road one could see Cuza’s palace surrounded by a solid brick wall. These village pubs are usually centers of social interaction between peasants, and also the place where gossip emerges. As I could see, Ruginoasa was no exception. Outside it was already dark and a small lamp in the square shed a dim light that allowed us to see some human shadows inside both pubs. We had the chance to spot three villagers that looked a little drunk, but we were lucky enough to ask them a few questions before they disappeared into the night. This was how we learned that the battle took place less than one kilometer away, on a road going along the walls of Cuza’s residency, connecting the lower part of the *comună*’s village – called *the valley* to the upper part – called *the hill*. After this short talk with the three men, there was no one else on the streets. We were hoping for somebody to arrive so that we could ask them more things about the next day’s main event: *the Battle of the Masked People*.

After having waited for about fifteen minutes in the dark, we were lucky enough to see two men getting out of the fog on the village streets, followed right away by two young men. This was an opportunity I could not miss, I told myself. Cautiously, I approached the two young men and asked them about the next day's battle. They looked at us, saw our

camera bags and identified us immediately as TV cameramen. I had no time to explain that we were not from the TV, but anthropologists. Instead, I did confirm that we were there to film the ritual, and that we needed to know exactly where it would take place. One of the young men who introduced himself as an organizer of the next day's ritual gave us some very accurate details that matched well with what we had learned from the drunk men we had previously talked to.

These villagers whom I could never identify later, gave me the first information about the battle. They described it as a confrontation between two groups of young men: one from a village situated in the lower part of the locality, informally called *the valley*, and the other one from the upper part of it, called *the hill*. It sounded to me like a rite of passage, something resembling a transition to adulthood. I could not wait to see the battle so that I could consolidate my first hypothesis and add more information to what I had just found. While we were having that conversation with the two young men, a villager around 50 and quite drunk, joined our group and started talking to us in a hoarse voice: "You will see tomorrow! There will be a big battle! You have to film! Which television do you belong to? Pro TV? I like Pro TV! They always present the battle very well." "We are not from the TV, but from a folklore association!", I said, hoping that I could find some anchorage in their mind that would help them define us somehow.

In a situation like this, telling people that I was an anthropologist coming from the U.S. to film their battle would have been even more awkward and might have increased the confusion. That moment, I was happier that I could get more details about the battle - the most important thing for me at that moment. Missing the ritual after such a long and exhausting trip would be extremely frustrating for an anthropologist. At the end of our conversation, I told myself I would take my chances and I asked the young man if he knew where my colleague and I could sleep overnight. It seemed that he understood the hint as he said he would have been happy to let us sleep in his house that night, but he already had relatives coming from other regions of the country to spend the New Year with them. Shortly afterwards, the young man left together with his fellow.

I had predicted it would be hard to find a host in such a short time! In fact, Bogdan, the leader of the *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica*, who had much more field experience in this area of the country, had warned me about how difficult it could be to find a host in Moldova right before the New Year. This is because in this region the New Year traditions

are an essential part of the local culture and an important element of kinship and family bonds. This is one of the reasons why many people from the city visit their relatives in these Moldavian villages, to celebrate together a genuine New Year with carols and winter rituals. In my previous field research, I had heard many peasants from all over the country expressing an idea that seemed to be widely accepted in the countryside: “A New Year without traditions and caroling teams is just like any other day of the year. You don’t feel as if it were the end of the year and a holiday!” Quite soon I was about to learn myself that this idea was valid for Moldavian villages much more than anywhere else in Romania. For this reason, around Christmas and New Year's Eve, the houses of the Moldavian peasants are full of guests. In this context, we only had one solution: finding a cheap hotel. I asked the two villagers about a hotel, and they said we would only find one twelve kilometers away in the city of Pașcani.

Before leaving, I wanted to observe the atmosphere inside the pub. Just as in other similar pubs I had visited in other villages, inside there were a thick cigarette smoke, a diffuse light and a powerful unmistakable smell of cheap blended beverages. Several men were drinking at a table and a bored bartender - as in most cases, a young girl - were there. The men at the tables identified us immediately as being TV cameramen as I heard them saying the word “ProTV” just as we got in. We also realized they belonged to one of the fighting teams. It was one of the most common occurrences at the beginning of a new field research when you think you know something and while what you know may actually be true, beyond that piece of information there is an entire snowball of social networks and other information that you cannot comprehend.

In this case, comprehending was much more difficult than with some other events mainly because of the physical violence the ritual involved. I wondered what the impetus was for this brutal ritual violence during New Year's Eve when people usually carol their neighbors and wish good things to one another. During my eight years of field experience in Romania, I had met many people with whom I talked a lot about New Year traditions, and they referred to them as a time of joy, peace and reconciliation. What then was the role of the violent tradition in this landscape? I looked more carefully at the young men around me and saw scars on their heads that I guessed were signs of the club hits they had received.

As we went to get drinks from the bartender, I could hear them starting to talk about us, and I managed to deduce from the discussion fragments I could get that they tried to guess what TV station we belonged to. I avoided interacting with them as I did not know how

friendly they would be to a TV crew after drinking a couple of vodka glasses. Sometimes, people were happy to have their rituals filmed, but some other times they did not like to see a camera in the middle of their daily life. Here, the situation was somehow complicated by the physical violence involved in the confrontation. What if the camera records people committing acts of extreme violence? After having spent just fifteen minutes in the pub, we left to the city of Pașcani.

Right before leaving the pub in Ruginoasa, the bartender recommended us a small hostel situated at the periphery of Pașcani city that she knew was not very expensive. We also learned that the small guesthouse belonged to a successful local immigrant to Italy who had returned to the country to open a business. The price was much higher than we had expected, around \$50 per night, a quite a high price for that area. Upon our arrival, we expected to see some tourists or visitors as the Ruginoasa tradition had been well-advertised on many TV channels. Instead, we found out that we were the only visitors. Except for a couple of cameramen and journalists who had arrived the night before and found their accommodation at one of the other hotels in Pașcani, as we learned later the next day, there were no other money that this custom brought to the region's economy. Once again, this indicator demonstrated that the tradition has not yet been absorbed into the market economy of the area, despite the high publicity it had received.

#### **E. My First Day of Field Research**

The next day, as we heard from the owner of the hostel, the preparation for the battle was supposed to start at 5:00 in the morning. We woke up at 4:00 a.m. and drove towards Ruginoasa. The days before, it had snowed, but that morning a dense and very cold rain started as soon as we arrived in front of the same pub we had left the day before. Despite the icy conditions, there were already at least 20 cars parked out there and we could barely find a free place. Soon after that, we walked towards the place where the battle with clubs was supposed to take place, about one kilometer away. Although we were getting cold-wet, our main concern was to protect our cameras.

Huddling in the freezing rain for two hours, without knowing for sure if the ritual would take place, made me think that perhaps I should have chosen a different profession. Nonetheless, even a situation like that could turn into a good opportunity for participant observation. While waiting outside, I saw more and more people coming to that area. Some

people came by cars with plates issued in counties other than Iași, meaning that people had traveled from 60-70 kilometers away just to see this short battle.

Finally, around 6:30 a.m., a small pub next door opened and many people who had been waiting outside just like us for more than one hour, went inside to buy some hot wine. Many others, especially villagers, bought vodka. I saw two guys whom I identified immediately as being part of a fighting team because of special colorful costumes and long, hard, wooden clubs. They asked for a strong beverage that they sipped in a matter of seconds. After they left, people from the crowd followed them, as if electrified. “Something should happen quite soon. Let’s follow them!”, I said to my colleague. Minutes later, people gathered in the courtyard of a nearby house. Only a few people in the crowd were allowed to enter the courtyard, and priority was given to those with big professional cameras. This was how we were able to get in and film the preparations for the battle. I felt a taste of adrenaline, nervousness, bravery and fear – sensations that most likely accompany all warriors before any battle. I filmed the masks and the way people laced up their costumes.

Although I was able to film all of the preparations, no one seemed willing to talk to me about them. Assessing the effectiveness of the mask was an important part of this ceremonial preparation. Teams tested their masks by letting their friends hit masked heads with their clubs as hard as they could. It looked as if the masks were very well made so that they “heroically” resisted all those repeated practice blows. The preparations lasted for more than an hour. The fighters and the older men encouraging and giving these fighters a lot of advice, seemed to be very proud of what they had accomplished: several full “warrior” suits with heavy masks strongly attached to the body with strong ropes, colorful clothes contrasting with the ugly masks, and heavy, two-meter-long clubs in their hands.

At a certain point, when the fighters were all ready for battle, an invisible signal made their team move outside the courtyard. The group of fighters created a compact column in the middle of the disorganized crowd of people. Like iron filings attracted by a magnet, all the people followed them. I had to decide whether to continue making observations while walking with the masked fighters, listening to what they were saying in preparation for the battle, or backing up and recording everything happening around the combatants. I felt like a surgeon in a triage, and in a split decision I opted to film as much of the ritual as I could. Perhaps it was a salvage anthropologist decision based on the assumption that this was

perhaps the only chance to record a particular event that would vanish in a couple of years with the torrent of changes affecting Romanian villages today.

My friend Nelu took the photo camera, and I began filming with the video camera. I took a frame with the people leaving the courtyard and after that I began to run after the crowd hoping to get another good frame as soon as I passed by them. Imagine being surrounded by at least three hundred people, all trying to see a group of twenty masked men who are walking quite fast in a direction that you don't know! Imagine them walking across a narrow road and the entire crowd following them wants to get as close as possible to the group of masked people. I tried my best to pass by them, but it was quite difficult. I continued to pay attention to what was happening around me as I tried to memorize what people around me were saying, and hoping I could seize something relevant from their discussions. Images of other anthropologists in similar field situations came to my mind: Malinowski left alone on the beach of a Pacific island (Malinowski 2013) or Clifford Geertz running away with the local participants in the Balinese cockfight when the state authorities had decided to intervene in order to stop the game (Geertz 1972:3).

The entire crowd was primed for seeing the fight. Coming up behind the group of masked men were other villagers without masks; I had no idea that they would also be involved in the fight. After 20 minutes of walking, the group I was following met the opposing group of fighters who came from the opposite direction of the road. It was an electrifying moment as the crowd went crazy in expectation of the fight. Still, it seemed that the conflict was not as "traditional" as one would have expected. In addition to the masked fighters and the onlookers, there were also policemen who followed the groups from behind. Some local leaders from the villagers, who decided when the fight should begin, were also present.

I happened to see a large pile of snow up ahead and, moving as quickly as I could, I gained a good position right on top of it. Of course, I had little chance to film without being jostled by the crowd as many other people around me wanted to get that privileged spot from which one would have an excellent view on the battle scene. On both sides of me, as well as behind me, there were already many people pushing me from all sides. In the next few seconds the fight began. It was not what I expected. My first impression was that there were no rules at all and the fighters just indiscriminately hit each other. In fact, there were no

serious injuries, as I expected when seeing the brawl, except for one guy who lost his mask and was hit in the head with a club.

When the two groups of masked people began to fight face-to-face, their long clubs proved to be useless as the distance was too short for them to be effective. The fighters began to use their hands and shoulders, and by holding the clubs with both hands, they used them to take the offensive and create a breach in the opposite crowd. Under these circumstances, it seemed that the winner of the fight would be decided by the force of those who were able to push the hardest. This proved to be the group from *the uphill village* that had the largest number of people, mostly unmasked, and who could thus see better during such a chaotic confrontation. Finally, they succeeded in pushing the other crowd further and further away, like in a rugby game. After two or three minutes, the flanks of *the downhill village* began to collapse and some members of *the uphill village* gradually gained access from the edges and got over the masked men from the “enemy village”, eliminating them one by one and pushing them down to the piles of snow collected on the road margins. The fighters from the *downhill village* grew weaker and then suddenly realized that there was no hope of winning. This made them run away, leaving their clubs and sometimes even their masks behind, only to see them later taken as trophies by the winners.

When the fighters from the *downhill village* ran away, being chased by their *enemies*, the entire crowd of people started to walk in the same direction, towards the locality's center where the square with the two pubs was. I noticed that, right after the battle, some villagers from the *downhill village* began to blame the head of the police “because the rules had not been respected!”. That moment, I was almost sure the policemen would be attacked and that another fight would start, but, this did not happen, perhaps because a compact group of gendarmes was close by. Still, some of the villagers from the losing team viciously began to challenge and blame as many people as they could, and before we realized what had happened, the next ones they began to spout their fury at was us, the cameramen who “were not supposed to film anything!”. That moment I was sure we would have been beaten up if the police had not been present. I wondered, what was the relationship between this “tradition” and the violence it generated? But I was sure this would be a question whose answer I would not discover easily.

It seemed that the battle had the function of restructuring some of the power relations in the locality and of giving more prestige to the winners. This hypothesis was confirmed



when I had the chance to see and to film the celebration of victory in a downtown pub. Girls were coming to take pictures with the winners; people praised them and bought them beer; and even the owner of the pub offered two boxes of beer for free. When the celebration was over, a sea of cars and people headed to their own houses and the cameramen from various TV stations did the same. No outsider seemed to be interested in what happened after the battle. Surprisingly, I did not see any TV crew interviewing either the winners or the losers, or filming the pub atmosphere. It seemed that all those things were relevant only for me. I understood that for most of the outsiders who attended the battle, this was just a simple spectacle resembling a soccer or rugby game. Still, not all of the people I met seemed to enjoy the fight. I heard some local women lamenting that this was the most stupid thing they (the local inhabitants) had ever invented. Later, I was able to talk to an elder who stated that the battle had become more violent in the years after the 1989 Revolution and that before it had not been done with clubs, but with whips, and used to be boundd by fair-play when he was young.

After the discussion I had with the elder, I started to question the role mass-media and the YouTube videos posted on the internet had in shaping this fight. Have they influenced this tradition and its evolution during the last years? Why were local people ambivalent and why did they sometimes have contradictory feelings regarding the TV crews? What was the role of bystanders who had come from far away just to see the battle? How have all these things influenced the “tradition”? Knowing already a few things about this “tradition” and having observed all these external influences, I was wondering if this fight could still be called a rural ritual or rather a very recently invented tradition.

Usually, the rural rituals I had filmed in the past were held by villagers as community events. In recent years, many of these events have been captured by TV crews as they were held not only in villages, but also in the local folklore festivals organized by an increasing number of political leaders in the cities during winter holidays. As I mentioned before, such Romanian traditions generate high TV ratings and they are usually wrapped in a Romantic-nationalist vision. This is how the urban working class created during communism from the uprooted peasants could enjoy watching certain events that reminded them of their village and childhood. Indeed, the idea of heritage and the sense of belonging to a community, together with a form of nationalist mythology, underscored all these broadcasts. In spite of this, the Ruginoasa fight does not seem to match the patters, and generates more controversies and contradictory discussions than any other rural tradition in Romania.

The celebration in the pub lasted for about two hours. Meanwhile, even locals started to leave in small groups, when we decided to leave, too. I talked on the phone to my friend Bogdan who was filming a different ritual in Strunga, a *comună* situated in the southern part of Iași county, 22 kilometers away from Ruginoasa. We met him in front of the township hall, right before the procession of a *Goat team* showed up. A holiday atmosphere with decorations and lights on the trees and buildings, together with some old electoral posters, stuffed the central square of the *comună*. Just like us, a group of villagers seemed to be waiting for the arrival of the caroling teams.

Before the arrival of the *Goat team* in the square, there was already a group of about forty mummers who were playing small sketches in front of the viewers – no more than 40-50 people at that moment. I was absolutely amazed by the combination of traditional and modern clothing worn by mummers. The whole atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, and the vivid colors of the mummers' clothes made everything even more attractive. Nothing there reminded me of the tensions and conflicts I had witnessed in Ruginoasa, just a few kilometers away.

As the *Goat team* arrived in front of the mayor's office, it drew right away the attention of the viewers gathering around the performers who immediately started to present their sketch. In fact, the sketch only consisted of a gently sung flute lyric that made the main character of the team – the *goat* – dance, flaunting its multicolored costume before the crowd. The *Dance of the Goat* is one of the rituals that fascinated folklorists in the past. I learned immediately from bystanders that the folk theater teams such as the *Goat* and the *Deer* ones that were about to arrive, would give a short representation in front of town hall and, after that, would start their travel from house to house throughout the villages of the locality where they would get money from the householders.

I observed that the clothes and the shoes of the *Goat team* members were homemade. About sixty years ago, during wintertime, when there was less work in the household, the women in peasant communities were involved in spinning hemp for making clothes. After World War Two, during the first years of communism, Romania became more industrialized and clothes/shoes production became some of the main industries developed in the country. Since then, most of the peasants abandoned traditional handicrafts and started to buy their clothes from the stores. At the end of 2009, watching carolers wearing traditional homemade clothes by their grandparents seemed almost unbelievable.

I recalled how, in my early career as an anthropologist, I once had the patience to record an interview with an old man who told me step-by-step how this kind of clothes were made out of hemp. The interview was more than one hour long as the man described in detail the entire process, explaining every step, from planting the hemp to making the clothes with certain primitive looms. Only two generations ago, these rural communities lived in an economy where they were the producers as well as the consumers of their own goods. Money was rare at the time, and peasants generally lived their life without buying anything from the stores that were anyway quite far outside most of the villages. That is why back then merchants used to organize local fairs so that the peasants could sell their grains and, at the same time, buy the tools they needed, especially iron agricultural tools like ploughs, hammers, axes, knives, saddles, and so on.

Today, most of the fairs are gone. Strunga's downtown is divided in two by the E583 national road. On one side of the road there are two pubs. The *comună* hall is on the other side of the road, and sometimes the folk artists performing their sketches during Christmas and New Year's Eve have to take care not to get hit by cars, as the car road is close to the *comună* hall and the space left for the performers is quite narrow for a larger crowd of people. Nowadays, market economy has become increasingly visible in the clothes, masks and artifacts of the mummers. Most of the mummers' masks were actually Halloween rubber masks or local masks decorated with artifacts purchased from supermarkets in the cities around, or brought by migrants from Italy and Spain. Just few mummers had traditional homemade masks. Still, even those homemade masks sometimes wore the mark of globalization. I could observe that some of the symbols and writings on the mummers' masks and clothes came from American culture. I could read in English: "Merry Christmas", "Girls" and "Happy New Year". I even observed a mummer wearing a kind of skirt made out of empty beer cans. In this case, the market economy, consumption and waste specific to modern society had become very clear. In contrast with these colorful costumes and Halloween masks worn by the mummers, were the members of the *Goat* band with their traditional homemade clothes and shoes. For me, this was a subtle metaphor for the way globalization takes hold in local peasant communities!

Immediately after the *Goat* team finished its sketch, some other groups of folk play performers - such as two bands performing the *Dance of the Deer* and one band performing

*The Outlaws*<sup>1</sup> - came in front of the town hall to present their sketches. These were usually less than ten minutes long. Only *The Outlaws* play lasted about 30 minutes, and I saw people often yawning until the representation reached its end. In the meantime, the mummers played their own tricks or very short sketches trying to draw the attention of the viewers, too. The idea of masquerade was deeply involved in the mummers' play while folk theater teams like the band of the *Goat*, the band of the *Deer* and *The Outlaws* seemed to set apart from the cheap tricks mummers played.

The mummers' masks and tricks were the main attractions of their short shows. In the crowd, my attention was drawn by two young men who wore gas masks along with a more traditional woolen coat. Seeing a gas mask in such a place and context was striking. At least for me, this representation induced, once again, the idea of violence. Used for the first time during World War One, the gas mask represents a protection against war's deadly gases. This use of poisonous gases during the war is a culmination of a dehumanizing idea: the mass murder of human beings. At the same time, the men with the masks who were accompanying more traditional processions like that of the *Goat* band created in my mind a grotesque representation of a post-atomic *Goat* of postsocialist times.

After the sketch of *The Outlaws*, the crowd started to disperse and, for the first time, I had the chance to talk more to my friends in *Orma*. Bogdan showed me a long list of villages in that county and the customs performed there. Impressed of what I had seen in Strunga, I was curious to see more rural rituals there. I picked a *comună* that seemed attractive in terms of New Year traditions: Heleşteni. After taking this decision, we wished each other good luck and went in two different directions. We agreed to call each other only by the end of the day to see what we would have accomplished and especially if we could find a decent place to spend the night.

The trip to Heleşteni lasted no more than 30 minutes. The first thing we did when we got there was to go to the mayor's office. Luckily enough, we found the mayor in his office. I told him exactly who I was and I talked a bit about my new ethnographic project in the region. He was surprised to find out that a graduate student from an American university was

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<sup>1</sup> *Haiducii/The Outlaws* or the folk theater with *Outlaw* topic may be seen especially in Moldova region, Romania. Initially, this play was the creation of Mihail Pascaly, a playwright of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But it was later borrowed by peasants and diversified into tens of versions and local forms performed all over the Moldavian villages. In the peasants' vision, the outlaws were folk heroes who fought for justice, stealing money from the rich boyards and sharing it afterwards to poor peasants. *The Outlaws* presents theatrically the story of an outlaw fighting for the justice of the poor and finally getting caught by the cops and being sent to prison (Oprișan 1987).

interested in their “local traditions”, and was very open to cooperate, letting us know he was happy to let us film all of the New Year's Eve rituals that were to be held in the *comună*. Regarding our accommodation, he told us the comună hall had just finalized the repairs at the *Poor Children's Center* that had been done with local and EU Phare Program funds, too. We learned that there were two rooms in that center and we could be accommodated there. One of the most important information we got from him was that the mummers' teams would start showing up in front of the town hall in about an hour. Faced with so many good news, I started to believe I was really lucky at the start of this new research project. Involuntarily, I remembered again that I had petted a baby goat at the beginning of my trip.

The hour before the ceremony started in front of town hall was not wasted at all. While we were talking to the mayor inside his office, the secretary of the township hall and a writer from Iași - whom I later learned was Emilian Marcu, one of the most outstanding poets and writers in Moldova region - came in. The writer had been born and raised in Heleşteni, and was visiting his relatives during the New Year's Eve. The secretary was a jocular old man, who had been the mayor of the locality in the first years after the 1989 Revolution. When they heard I was interested in the battle of Ruginoasa, they immediately told me their version about “this tradition”. The writer even accepted me to film him while he was telling me his version of the battle:

There is violence in this entire story... but, it is an apparent violence. They make all the preparations before the real battle. They have some specific rules and codes that are well-known by those who participate. They hit each other only in those parts of the body that are well-protected. They hit each other on the head. But they wear some helmets with metal protection. That is why they hit each other on the head! More, they hit each other in the chest... But their chest is also protected. They don't hit their legs, arms or face! They have some rules similar to the samurais. It is an ancient tradition! I've known it since 1957 when I saw it for the first time. Actually, this is a *washing away* of the misunderstandings and conflicts accumulated during the entire year. The most striking aspect of this battle is that sometimes a guy from Dumbrăvița village gets married with a girl from Rediu village; he moves to that village and becomes an opponent of his village and a member of the opposite team. Thus he becomes an opponent of his previous team, even of his brothers... The fighters have some secrecy, for example about their costumes. All the members of a team make

similar costumes. The members from the opposite team make their costume in a different way. They recognize each other during the battle according to their costumes. On their costumes, they have some identification marks: a piece of a kerchief and so on... But they can always recognize each other! That is why this custom cannot be defined as a barbaric act! After the battle, which usually lasts from 4:00 to 5:00 a.m., all the people go home. And they meet each other again at 2:00 p.m. in front of the city hall. All of them meet over there! They talk, they drink, they dance... So they are friends. The conflict is over there, that precise moment, and lasts less than one hour” (Emilian Marcu, 59 years old, Heleşteni village, December 31, 2009, Interview).

The story was coherent, but there were some romanticized elements that did not match what I had seen on the field. Perhaps he was talking about some previous times when the rules of the battle were more firm and the fair-play was still in place. All these obvious contradictions made me become more cautious about the difference between the way the battle is perceived by locals and the things actually taking place on the field nowadays.

Soon after this interview, the mayor told us that we had to leave the cozy atmosphere of the office and go outside where it was much colder, because the mummers and the folk artists had already started to show up. As we got out around 2:20, we could already see how the inhabitants of the four villages of the Heleşteni *comună* had started to flow towards the large square in front of the town hall. Although I had filmed and conducted field research for eight years in rural Romania, the event unfolding in front of my eyes was totally amazing. Hundreds of people came in waves towards the mayor’s office. By chance, there was a large space in front of township hall and the courtyard of the building was surrounded by an iron fence. Thus, the mummers and the folk theater teams could perform their sketches without any fear of restrictions. The carriageway was outside the fence and, anyway, the mayor’s office building was located on a remote countryside road with almost no traffic.

Many of the people who came there were dressed as mummers, wearing masks and colorful costumes. But there were also folk play teams like the *Goat*, the *Deer*, *The Bears*, *The Small Horses*, *The Outlaws* and, of course, many bystanders who had come there only to see the spectacle. Very soon, the comună’s yard was filled with the waves of people who seemed to arrive continuously. Each band performed its sketch in front of the mayor, vice-mayor, secretary and some other employees of the mayor’s office.

The first to show up and who also seemed to have priority, were some teams of 16-19 year-old young men dressed in officer garments and traditional handmade costumes. Their army uniforms were indeed the official uniforms of the Romanian army from communism. These guys were part of compact teams of five-seven members among whom three-four were dressed as officers and one-two were wearing traditional peasant clothes. I could count three such teams. Some guys dressed as army majors - and who seem to be the head of the teams - were carried on a kind of improvised chairs on the shoulders of four mummers. Each of these teams stopped, disciplined, in front of the mayor, and then started to dance a so-called *hora*. This is a traditional dance where the dancers hold each other's shoulders and spin counterclockwise around an imaginary axis to the rhythm of drums and flutes.

The only artifact that connected these processions and the *Dance of the Goat* as I had known and filmed it in some other villages, was a small wooden mask carved in the shape of a goat head and held by a man. The guy who carried the small mask moved rhythmically the lower mobile jaw of the goat so that it clattered continuously in the rhythm of the drum and flute. I was wondering if I had understood well that this was indeed a *Dance of the Goat* and a *Goat team*. To clarify this dilemma, I asked more people in the crowd. Nevertheless, I always got the same answer: "These are the *Goat teams!*". My surprise came as a result of my previous field research in some other villages in Romania and of my childhood memories, where the *Goat* character was always completely covered with a decorated rug, and the man inside could not be seen. In those processions, the wooden mask was more elaborate and the man hidden under the rug was the one who manipulated the wooden jaw so that it resembled a living creature. Here, all these elements were gone and I would have not been less surprised to see the *Goat* reduced to a small mask carried in hand.

Besides these bands, there was another impressive procession: the *Deer*. This time, the performing band was quite numerous: eight drum players, a *Deer* dancer, a shepherd and an old man. The performance of the dancing *Deer* was very impressive and full of exuberance, while the rhythm of the eight drums was stunning. I noticed how, while the *Deer* was dancing, the viewers created a circle around the players and pushed each other to get as close to the artists as possible.

After all the teams presented a short version of their performance in front of the town hall, they started roaming in the yard. One character that impressed me was *The Spirit of the Dead*. I deduced this because he was carrying a dead animal – a fox and, wearing a black

gendarme costume and a demon mask that completed the image of an authentic *Thanatos* character. A man in a lion costume accompanied him. They both tried to scare people in the crowd with their grotesque guise and mainly by waving the dead fox around, a fact that created panic among young girls who ran away screaming.

Other costumes had been marked with the names of characters from soap operas or with the names of the most famous Romanian soccer players involved in public scandals. There were costumes mocking the slogans and the unfulfilled promises made by the candidates during the electoral campaign. I saw many other symbols borrowed from popular TV shows. Besides this, there were plenty of men dressed in women's clothes, probably the most common costume in the crowd. Last but not least, there were more traditional homemade masks, extremely beautiful and decorated with beads and colorful globes. The clothes of the masked people who wore those masks were also extremely colorful, and they looked like parrots or peacocks during their mating season.

I immediately learned that it was nearly impossible to make astute observations within such a carnivalesque environment, especially when nobody explained to me the significance of the symbols present there. Within such a rich environment, I tended to switch my focus continuously from one group to the other, without having to decide exactly what I should be observing or what kind of footage I should take. When we accidentally met in the crowd, these observations were confirmed by my friend Nelu who told me: "I think I have taken crappy shots. I didn't know what to film and where to focus my camera! In a crowd like this, I've become totally disoriented!" In spite of all these inconveniences, two days after, when I looked at the tapes we had filmed, I noticed many other aspects that I had not observed in the crowd. For example, I observed that it was common for mummers to tease women, touching their breasts or hitting their buttocks with plastic sticks or small rods, as well as to push the men who were not masked and to hit them with sticks, sometimes quite hard. Not even elders were exempt from this treatment; the mayor himself was kissed and licked on the neck, and he did not object in any way although he seemed to be quite embarrassed.

All of these events made me think about the ancient *Saturnalia* festival of the Romans or the medieval *Feast of the Fools* – both of them celebrated in the second part of December. Introduced around 217 in the Roman Empire and celebrated at the end of December, *Saturnalia* soon became a week-long celebration. One of the features of this event was that it embodied an inversion of the social order. Something that was normal during the year - for



example, a slave having to respect his/her master - became an opportunity for mockery during the days of *Saturnalia*. The same thing seemed to happen in Heleşteni. Authorities like the mayor and vice-mayor were mocked, the elders were disrespected, the women were bullied, touched or hit, girls were kissed, and mature men were hustled or even pushed down in the snow. Many mummers were dressed in strange costumes, uttering rude jokes or remarks, and breaking all possible social rules, at the first glance. The atmosphere of collective jazziness and exuberant energy, as well as the freedom of the participants who could make fun of all social, political and economic problems at the end of the year, made me take right away the decision to include Heleşteni on the map of my new research.

Consequently, there was another important observation I made while watching the crowd. Although it was a collective masquerade, the meeting in front of the Heleşteni mayor's office was at the same time a celebration of the individuals and their egos. Every masked man wanted to be more extravagant, more important or different from all the others. For this purpose, they carried crazy things like dead animals or rag dolls, invented interesting sketches and invested so many hours into designing their costumes and masks. I had my theory confirmed when I had the chance to talk to some of the participants two days later. Many of villagers reinforced the idea that one has to wear weird clothes during those days. The idea was that everyone had to find something more extravagant than all the others. In a way, this entire ritual was an expression of two tendencies: firstly, the glorification of the individual who had the opportunity to perform in front of his community and, secondly, a spectacular way a community mocks itself right before the New Year, transgressing the given social order and going beyond its daily collective norms and rules. At least this was what I thought during those first hours after my arrival in Heleşteni.

Another aspect that drew my attention was the presence of violence inside the entire carnival unfolding in front of the town hall. Nevertheless, this time the violence was milder compared to the Ruginoasa battle that I had seen earlier that morning. Paralleling these two rituals, I could see that there was a series of distinctions and rules about the way physical violence had been used and accepted. While the club battle was more brutal, there were still some rules and principles that allowed people to define what was acceptable and what was not. On the other side, during the carnivalesque meeting in Heleşteni, violence was more controlled and less fierce. People did not brutalize each other; instead, they used physical violence (hitting with small sticks or dolls), verbal violence (bad jokes and acid remarks), and

visual violence (wearing dildos or penises) in order to break the collective social rules and norms, and to get the attention of other villagers.

Although the carnival atmosphere lasted no more than two hours, the rituals continued throughout all four villages in the *comună* during the entire day, as I later found out. But that moment I felt I needed a short break. Indeed, I had this chance by the end of the carnival when I was invited again by the mayor to his office “to drink a hot tea and warm up”. I took the opportunity to let him know how impressed I was about this spontaneous carnival and how interested I was in conducting field research in Heleşteni. I knew that mentioning to local authorities and locals in a Romanian village that you wanted to study local folklore was always a good entry point for future research. In most cases, local peasants and local authorities were happy to hear that professional researchers were interested to write about their local heritage.

This common tendency, visible in practically all villages where I have conducted my research, is mostly rooted in the last two and half decades of communist times, when nationalist-communist doctrine has been widely promoted. Back then, the folklore of the peasants was used ideologically to build symbolic capital for the Communist Party leadership. In this context, the rural traditions were presented in TV shows, as well as in local and national festivals that brought certain rural traditions from their small, sometimes isolated villages to the spotlight of the national stage. Whatever the cause was, I and all my colleagues from *Orma* who conducted field research in the countryside, with little available resources, knew how to turn this situation to our own benefit, explaining to local authorities that our work could be highly beneficial for promoting local culture and traditions at higher levels. Indeed, the relation between social researchers and local authorities was most of the time beneficial for both sides; certain members of the *Orma* association were able to write monographs on local villages, articles and documentaries that were highly appreciated by the peasants participating in the study and by local political figures, too.

The mayor of Heleşteni received the news about my intention to conduct field research in his locality with a big smile on his face, and added “We have beautiful traditions here and we are proud of them. All outsiders who came here and watched them were always pleasantly impressed.” Besides this, he assured me of his entire logistic and moral support for my field research. This kind of openness during the very first meeting with a local political figure was quite rare, as I had learned from my previous experience, and I considered myself

lucky once again for having had the chance to meet a person like him. In the next hour, I had the chance to talk to the mayor, vice-mayor and the secretary who were curious about America, American people, Americans' lifestyle and culture. Suddenly, it looked as if we had switched the roles for a while, and I was the one who was interviewed. During our intensive talk, we were interrupted by the mayor's wife, Doina, who entered the office to let him know they had to leave for preparing the New Year's Eve. We were introduced to her and she added that "having visitors from the United States was something totally unexpected in a small locality like Heleşteni."

In the next few moments, we would realize that the surprise series of that day is not over. The mayor and his wife decided to invite us to their house on New Year's Eve under the pretext that it was too cold in the *Center for Poor Children's* building. Such an invitation in such a context was hard to refuse. However, we agreed that until midnight there were several hours of events that we wanted to take advantage of, wandering on the streets of the comună together with the mummers' teams.

During the few hours before 10:00, together with my colleague, I had the opportunity to follow the processions of the *Deer* and one *Goat* teams. We also saw the *Small Horses* team roaming through the comună's villages, followed by a small team of *Bears* performed by small children, *The Outlaws* and many mummers who, we learned, continued to walk throughout the locality around the clock with practically just a short 2-3 hours break in the early hours of the next morning. Instead of performing the same play in front of a large audience, like at the mayor's office, they performed the ritual in front of a much smaller audience as they went to all the houses where the householders let them in. Still, while the members of theatrical teams like the *Goat*, the *Deer*, the *Bears* and the *Outlaws* got some money from the people they performed for, the teams of mummers only received some wine and other beverages like the traditional strong *palincă*, or maybe some food if they were hungry. As the mayor explained to me later on that day: "The mummers only came to the villagers' houses to continue their funny sketches that we saw in front of the township hall. They do not have to learn any established role. For them, everything is improvisation and creation of ad-hoc fun. For this reason, they did not need any preparation before coming to people's households. That is why people never give them money and the performers do not demand any money."

By comparison, the people from the *Deer* or *Goat* teams can make \$80-150 each during those two days of intensive performance between December 31<sup>st</sup> and January 1<sup>st</sup>. Or, this is half of a minimum wage in Romania! Of course, there are big differences between the performances of the *Deer* and *Goat* teams, the *Outlaws*, the *Small Horses*, and so on. Their repertory, their plays and even the purpose of their performance were different in terms of morphology, symbols and meaning. While the *Deer* and the *Outlaws* were complex theatrical performances with actors interpreting some rural-based characters, the *Goat* in its Heleşteni version was just an opportunity for young lads in the village to dance with some young girls from the neighboring households. The *Small Horses* were also just a kind of stunning and intense dance played by 8-10 years old children who rode small wooden decorated ponies to the rhythm of a drum and a flute.

Despite the fact that all of these performers hoped to earn some money, this did not seem to be the main purpose of their long trip through the village. The motivations seemed to be multiple and I was just starting to scratch the surface of this complex social-economic landscape. I tried to engage dialogues with some of the performers, but they were quite reluctant to talking too much to a foreigner who could have been a reporter or a cameraman. Nevertheless, some of the performers told me that they enjoyed the local tradition of caroling their neighbors, relatives and friends because it made them feel happy and joyful. Indeed, their tour throughout the entire village was an illustration of the strong social ties among the inhabitants, as well as an enforcement of two ideas: that of the community celebrating together during winter holidays and that of a heritage common to all villagers who celebrate together the transition towards the New Year.

Around 10:00, we were barely able to find our way back to the mayor's house. His house was already full of people. Their main guests were the sister of Ms. Doina with her entire family: who had come from the city of Suceava, 100 kilometers away in a neighboring county, to celebrate their New Year together with their relatives in Heleşteni where they had grown up. There was also a 17-year-old niece who, I learned, was living in the same house with the mayor's family and was in their care, since her mother - a younger sister of Ms. Doina - had migrated to Italy where she was working as a personal care attendant for an elderly woman. The two daughters of the mayor' family were also present, both of them college students in the city of Iași.

When I saw that many people inside the house, I was totally embarrassed as I was sure that finding place for two more people would not be easy. Instead of these tensions, we found a relaxing atmosphere where we were welcomed and introduced to the guests. This was a good opportunity for the mayor to let them know that I and my colleague were interested in the local folklore and traditions. Ms. Doina's sister and her husband were both extremely knowledgeable about local folk rituals and they let me know that, since they lived far away now, a visit like this was a good opportunity for them to remember about their childhood and the way these rituals used to be held back in time.

For me, this meeting had suddenly transformed in an unexpected opportunity to learn about Moldavian families and the way they interacted during important events like the New Year's Eve. They enjoyed having many guests around the table, talking a lot, drinking good wine, and joking whenever the opportunity came. This was how I had the chance to talk about America, my new research in Moldova, as well as about the region I came from – the Jiu Valley in southern Transylvania. They all knew about this mining area because during communism time, they told me, there had been many people from their locality who migrated to the Jiu Valley where they had the chance to “make more money than in other parts of the country”. Our dialogue touched some realities that I knew well both from my experience as a child and teenager in the Jiu Valley, and from the contemporary history of Romania. I observed that the peasant-worker phenomenon that has fascinated many western anthropologists seemed to be a category that fit well with the experiences and life stories of the mayor's relatives.

While the discussion was in full swing, we heard some heavy noises as if coming from small trumpets sounds, rattling bells and the unmistakable infernal noise of wooden rolls, called *pârâitori*, that were rotated by mummers while walking on the streets. I learned immediately that for all the people present in the house this was a signal they had to cease any other activity they were doing, and wait for a group of mummers to come. Indeed, it was 11:30 when a group of seven mummers entered the mayor's courtyard producing an incredible noise in the meantime. I could recognize one or two masks I had seen in front of the town hall, but most of them were totally unfamiliar to me.

Three mummers wore wonderful homemade masks decorated with bright beads, and beautiful colorful clothes. The shortest among them seemed to be the head of the team as he was apparently leading the “hostilities” between their group and the householders. Another

mummer wore a sheep skin costume and a mask well matching his coat. The mask was made of black sheep fur and had a big long red nose attached to it that, together with a worn out and totally outdated woman purse hanging around the neck, created a grotesque image that both fascinated and disgusted the viewers, as I could tell from their reactions. Following the same line, another mummer was a man in drag wearing a Halloween mask with red thick lips and a powdered face. “She” was wearing a long red skirt, a fashionable woman hat decorated with plastic flowers and a “nice” purse. However, under the “beautiful” skirt, “she” had hidden a long blue cloth penis proudly presented to the hosts right when they were admiring “her” beautiful outfit. Together with the “whore”, there was a “Demon” or probably Lucifer himself as he was wearing a red rubber mask with black horns and a goat-like black beard with ferocious teeth. His role was to draw the hosts' attention to the mesmerizing figure of his partner, a scene that seemed to resemble one of the Biblical symbols and characteristics of Lucifer: that of attracting people to earthly pleasures in order to steal their souls. And, finally, there was a tall mummer dressed as an old grey-haired clown embodied by a Halloween rubber mask that had been homemade reprocessed by "transplanting" a kind of sheep fur to the top of its head. This “cosmetic surgery” made him look really hideous. Although mute, the clown's pantomime seemed to say that what people were about to see was not meant to be taken too seriously. He had a kind of gentle and sympathetic attitude that contrasted with the impudent behavior of the rest of the team.

I did not know that the real show was just about to begin when the team was invited into the hall at the entrance of the house. There, they started to reproduce the ribald atmosphere I had experienced in front of the *comună* hall, with the tall mummies kissing and fondling the women and girls around them, and even pommeling the mayor. I regarded the whole encounter as if it were an imaginary fight between the householders and the forces of the dark that tried to get over them at the end of the year. The giant tramps were speaking in squeaky voices so that nobody recognized them, saying all kinds of nonsense and making dirty jokes. But it seemed that Ms. Doina was a master in deciphering the person behind the mask, since she said “You are Mihai, it is over, I've recognized you!”. As soon as the young man heard his name, he removed his mask and became silent and resigned, sitting down on a bench close by. The scenario was repeated with all the other members of the team who finally removed their masks and became as nice and peaceful as a herd of lambs. The change was indeed spectacular. The masked characters were really ferocious, bold and rude, whereas the

young men sitting now at the table and drinking a glass of wine with the hosts were nice guys who engaged in a pleasant discussion about daily life and village gossip.

This sudden and unexpected change in the personality of the mummers, as soon as the mask had been removed, made me remember the thriller comedy movie *The Mask* with Jim Carrey as main character, interpreting a nice, shy but unlucky bank clerk who was sometimes ridiculed by his coworkers and who became a fierce demon as soon as he put a magic powerful mask on. Along the same line, I remembered a book I had recently read before starting my field trip: "*Masks, Their Meaning and Function*". Right in the beginning of the book, there was a paragraph that started lurking in my mind as soon as I saw the behavior of the mummers inside the household: "Masks are still worn, of course; in many European countries, at carnival time, ordinary people appear disguised as pirates, Indian princes or whatever other picturesque character takes their fancy. But this is disguise only, and the wearers have no idea of actually personifying the character behind whose mask they hide. Originally, every mask was imbued with significance, and the mask itself or the person wearing it mysteriously represented some power or spirit" (Lommel 1972:7).

The discussions did not last too long. The mayor himself told everybody there were just a couple of minutes left until 12:00 a.m. His daughters hurried up to bring some bottles of champagne and some fireworks that had been specially bought for the event. Everybody was invited to take part in this short ceremony. I learned afterwards that, every year at 12:00, bringing the champagne and fireworks outside in the street, in the fresh air, drinking and knocking a glass with whoever was in the house at that time, had been a family tradition. Thus, we drank our tasty beverage in the light of the fireworks and sang together a traditional song usually intoned in such occasions.

After this short event, the group of mummers left and the mayor's family and guests went into the house to eat, drink and continue the talk. At the same time, they kept waiting with ears pricked so that they could hear the other teams who were supposed to come. The atmosphere was incredibly friendly and at the same time productive from the perspective of my research.

Nevertheless, in spite of this extraordinary day, I felt that my body and my mind were not listening to me anymore. There were moments when I felt as if falling asleep even when standing up. The jet lag, the continuous twenty-one hours of being awake without any sleep, the glass of champagne and the two more cups of homemade wine I had drunk, got over me.

I escaped the party to call my parents and relatives to send them my good wishes for the New Year. My parents were relieved I was safe after watching the brutality of the fight that had been presented on TV. Finally, I was able to talk to my friend Bogdan who told me they were still on the field filming the ritual of the *Bears* in Bădeni, a village 45 kilometers away. Their research was going well, too, except for the fact that they had only been able to get accommodation in an unheated and wretched village school. But he said they hoped to be able to accompany the *Bears* team the entire night, and to spend maybe just a couple of morning hours inside the school. I told him about my experience and he congratulated me for this good start of my new field research.

With these thoughts in mind, I entered the house and Ms. Doina said they had decided to let us retreat to “our room” since we both looked very tired. When I went into the living room, I understood the real reason of their concern. My friend Nelu had fallen asleep on their sofa, most probably in the middle of a conversation. I thanked them, and we were able to go to the room where we had left all our equipment. I reminded my friend that we had to mark the tapes with the dates and the rituals that we had recorded. I went to the car to bring some other things inside, and 10 minutes later when I came back I found my friend sleeping once again on the bed with the same clothes on, after having taken only his shoes off. By his side, I saw that just half of the tapes had been marked. I put everything aside for the next day, and I tried to lie down for just a few minutes. Apparently, I fell asleep immediately. I woke up a couple of minutes later when I felt a human presence moving close to me. It was the mayor’s niece, Andreea, who had seen through the door left ajar that we were sleeping without any blanket on, and she came to put a blanket over us. It was the last image that my brain was able to process after almost twenty-two hours of being awake, roaming through unknown villages and encountering a new anthropological field.

This was just the first day of my fieldwork in Heleşteni, Ruginoasa and the neighboring Moldavian villages. Since then I spent almost every end of the year in the region, in addition to six other full months in 2012 supported by a grant from the American National Science Foundation. During the entire period, the family of the Heleşteni’s mayor hosted me, and I became the anthropologist whom the villagers called “The American”.



## CHAPTER II

### HELEȘTENI COMMUNITY AND ITS RITUALS

#### A. Introduction

The second chapter of my study presents the rural community where I spent most of my time during field research, namely Heleșteni *comună*<sup>2</sup>, in the Moldova region of Eastern Romania. I will present and analyze the *Mummers' Plays* in this locality in relation to anthropological and sociological concepts and theories such as rites of passage, labor migration, and demographic decline. This kind of approach is innovative in mummers' plays analysis because, as Bogatyrev adequately observed, these cultural elements have been examined for a long time under the lens of a nationalist Folkloristics influenced by Romanticism, being regarded as surviving elements of extinct cultures. This is one the reason why “the study of how the peasants describe and interpret them has been neglected” (Bogatyrev 1998[1929]:17).

Understanding how peasants describe, interpret and make sense of these customs in their daily life experience will be the focus of the present chapter. I follow and analyze the changes in the morphology, symbolism and practice of these rituals throughout a few decades, when the this rural community witnessed the most drastic social transformations as a result of the modernization policies led by the communist state, and later on under the influence of global capitalism. I started from the idea that *Mummers' Plays* might be not only an interesting research topic, but also lenses through which one could observe recent economic, political and social transformations within a rural community during several decades. I also draw upon historic documents of the mummers' tradition. The diachronic method of analyzing sources reveals the dynamics of those rituals in time, and could facilitate the right understanding of what, how and to what extent some specific aspects were transmitted throughout generations.

I open the chapter by introducing to the reader the oldest documents that mentions the villages of Heleșteni *comună*, and then analyzing the oldest documents that describing *Jocul Caprei/ The Dance of the Goat*, and *Jocul Cerbului/ The Dance of the Deer*, two of the oldest and widely known winter rituals from Moldova region. Then, I am moving to the analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> Comună/Comune [plural] – An administrative-territorial unit on the territory of Romania, usually comprising 3-6 villages under the jurisdiction of the same mayoralty.

the winter rituals as they take place in the present in Heleşteni, namely *Jocul Caprei/ The Dance of the Goat*, *Jocul Cerbului/ The Dance of the Deer* and *Mascaşii Pantomimici/ The Pantomimic Mummers*.

## **B. Heleşteni – Its Past... and Its Mummers' Past**

During my first meetings with the inhabitants of Heleşteni *comună*, whenever I asked them about *Mummers' Plays* and the way they related to the locality's past, the people reassured me each time that these customs were „hundreds of years” old, and that they had been transmitted for generations in an unaltered shape. These statements did not seem plausible, especially knowing that a community's collective memory is usually neither that accurate nor does retaining data from such a distant past.

Therefore, I decided to conduct a rigorous research in the archives of Iaşi County and in the oldest works available in order to gather valid information about these places' past, and especially about the history of the rituals I had observed in my field research. The oldest document I found referring to region where the villages of today's Heleşteni *comună* are located, dated back to the times of Alexandru cel Bun (Alexandru the Good), a medieval king who lead Moldovian kingdom between 1400-1432. It was an act of donation issued on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1401 and showing how the king himself and his brother Bogdan, gave Plotuneşti village from the Strunga *comună* to the nobleman Plotun “who served in just and faithful service”, and also marking the village borders. Most probably back then Plotuneşti village was no more than a hamlet with few houses, since the village's name comes, of course, from the name of the nobleman receiving it. (Cihodaru, Caproşu, and Şimanschi 1975). Generally, documents from the 15<sup>th</sup> century referring to Heleşteni area are very sparse to the extent that the next one I could find had been issued nine decades after and referred to Strunga *comună*, just a few kilometers away from Heleşteni (Cihodaru, Caproşu, and Ciocan 1980).

Documents related specifically to villages of Heleşteni *comună* are more recent, dating back only to late 16<sup>th</sup> century. These documents refer to lords denouncing one another, hearings before the ruler for reasons related to land possession or sales, as well as for other matters. If at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we found more generous donation acts providing significant areas of lands to noblemen for services offered to the ruler, two hundred years later we witness tensions and conflicts between noblemen for accumulation of capital and acquisition of as much land as possible.

As Moldavian historians well noticed, “the nobility status changed at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, together with the Ottoman rules. Among the old noble families, few remained. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, others showed up, occupying high dignities, acquiring significant wealth (Movileștii, Buciu Costea, who ruled over 39 villages or parts of villages, Nicoară Prăjescul with 26, D. Buhuș - 35, Gavriliță Costache - 34, Gh. Ursachi -102, Miron Costin – 89, Iordachi Ruset, more than 105)” (Furtună and Șoimaru 2003:30-31).

After 1612, the documents related to Heleşteni and surrounding villages, are more frequent. We are dealing specifically with sale activities – purchase documents but also noblemen denouncements talking about the struggle for power at the time, and also about aristocratic interests related to the Heleşteni area. The study of 17<sup>th</sup> century documents shows the fact that the reign of the king Vasile Lupu (1634-1653) is the richest in issuing documents relating to Heleşteni *comună*. For Heleşteni area, Vasile Lupu’s reign (April 1634 - April 1653; May - July 1653) was an intense period of fight and tensions among boyars to acquire large plots of land and to increase their wealth. As historians Alexandru Furtună and Vasile Șoimaru stated:

The noblemen were always troubled by dissatisfactions, some of the greatest yearning for rulership, the smaller ones wanting new titles and wealth. They often denounced the nobleman to the court or conspired with the help of strangers against the ruler. Starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, noblemen were frequently divided into factions, depending on the sympathy for the neighboring power: the noblemen from Movilești noblemen branch were Polish sympathizers, the Cantacuzinești noblemen – Austrian partizans. During the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were three noblemen political factions: a Turkish one (including most noblemen), a Russian one, whereas the third one was Austrian. Starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the local nobility fought against Greek’s access to ruling offices. The practice came back mostly together with the Fanariots (Furtună and Șoimaru 2003) (Appendix A<sup>3</sup>).

The study of these archive documents shows that the origin of villages in today's territory of Heleşteni *comună* dates back to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Beyond this time, the population of these localities was extremely sparse, just a few hamlets, and the documentary

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to all documents that have been the subject of this archive research can be found in the Appendix A of the dissertation

references regarding these are very rare<sup>4</sup>. 17<sup>th</sup> century is also the context where we discover the first mentions of *Mummers' Plays* in the area. Such a document, published by historian Nicolae Iorga, tells us a story happening on December 28, 1656, during Gheorghe Ștefan's reign (April 1653; July 1653-March 1658), Vasile Lupu's successor to throne. The document is actually a letter by a Swedish ambassador called Welling on a diplomatic mission in Iași, the capital of the Moldavian Kingdom, together with his secretary Hildebrandt. He describes the ruler Gheorghe Ștefan as "Christian, kind, and worried about the menacing dangers approaching the country". The letter itself reveals the dangers of traveling to Iași city mostly for a Christian emissary from Northern Europe. The Swedish ambassador and his team are welcomed by a boyar sent by the ruler to warn the travelers that Iași should only be entered at night; one of the Turkish clerks sent there by the Ottoman Court could spot them in daylight, and the visit of a Christian diplomat at the Moldavian Court should rather remain secret.

Arriving in the evening in the town of Iași, Welling describes its numerous churches and oaktree pavements, with Christmas markets full of game and especially quails. He describes the holiday atmosphere, the *hore* (round group dances) performed even by soldiers, and also a particular folk play the author witnessed. The custom the Swedish diplomat describes is precisely *Jocul Caprei/The Dance of the Goat* that he presents as "a dance envisaging a goat covering a man, and performed by a man. At the end of the play, a boy used to shoot an arrow at the goat, thus ending the sketch, with the boy getting a tip. Thus, a sort of primitive hunting scene was performed" (Iorga 1928)<sup>5</sup>.

Only fourteen years after the event that the Swedish ambassador describes, there is another mention of the same winter ritual, this time in an ecclesiastical text written by Dimitrie Barilă, Moldova's metropolitan. Known under the name *Dosoftei*, he is considered

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<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that the study of the mummers' plays could not go further in time, especially in other localities much older than Heleșteni, and especially by using other methods. Such a trial was made by historian John Clark in his 2015 study "*Playing the Stag" in Medieval Middlesex? A perforated antler from South Mimms Castle - parallels and possibilities*. In this article, Clark highlights, in addition to the documents attesting the *Deer's Dance* in England, certain archaeological findings of ancient artifacts, for example, few perforated deer horns that could have been part of a deer mask used during deer-like rituals (Clark 2015). However, in the context of the research and methodology chosen in the present research, the first historical evidence to discuss the mummers' plays in the county of Iași are certain historical documents that do not go beyond the first decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>5</sup> This ritual is more complex than the short version described by Welling and, at least in its variants investigated after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it also comprised the goat's hunting, its ritual killing and the following weep, ending with the ritual burial of the mask – in this case the goat's head. The custom of killing, weeping and burying the goat is nowadays gone in the region of Moldova, but it can still be found in Transylvania where a variant very close to the one the Swedish ambassador described was even documented and filmed in the early 2000s by the ethnologist Bogdan Neagota in the villages of Romos, Romoșel and Vaidei, close to Orăștie town, in Hunedoara county

one of the first Romanian scholars and first national Romanian poet, especially because of the translation of the versified *Book of Psalms*. In one of the verses in the *Book of Psalms*, Dosoftei enumerates a series of pagan rituals that the people used to perform and the church condemned<sup>6</sup>: “We also have black magic charms for God’s evil eye/That transform the inner self of any man/ Together with farces, goat dances, cuckoos<sup>7</sup> and monster-puppets<sup>8</sup>,/ And magic spells from maids that bathe down the valley<sup>9</sup> and many other pagan customs” (Dosoftei 1974 [1673]).

The fact that Dosoftei, author of the versified *Book of Psalms*, lived in Iași when writing the work, is relevant for our analysis, since this city is only 62 km away from Ruginoasa and 68 km away from Heleşteni. Obviously, the ritual of *Țurca* or *Jocul Caprei*, mentioned by Moldova’s metropolitan at that time, was part of the cultural area including Heleşteni, too.

Less than 50 years after the publication of Dosoftei’s *Book of Psalms*, one of the most appreciated old literature works about Moldova was published. This was *Descrierea*

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<sup>6</sup> „Avem și pentru farmeci la Dumnezeu ură/Și ce omul să schimbă dintr-a sa făptură,/ Cu ghidușuri, cu țurcă, cuci și cu geamale,/Tras în vale ș-alte din păgâni tocmeale”(Dosoftei 1974 [1673]).”

<sup>7</sup>Cuckoo’s Day is a traditional rural custom commonly practiced in Romanian villages close to the Danube before Passover, during the Shrove Tuesday. During the ritual, young men and women dressed as male and female cuckoos, wearing huge, absolutely impressive masks, are tapped by villagers on the shoulder in order to “chase the evil away” or “to be healthy throughout the year”. The custom is described by various old church documents as a “devilish inquisitiveness” perhaps because of the huge and ugly masks and the carnival-like show of the masked characters walking round and round the village. For references, see Mircea Vulcănescu (1970:173-176). Today the custom is almost extinct, being practiced only in few villages in Southern Romania, most notably in Brănești, Ilfov County.

<sup>8</sup>“*Geamalele*” (monster-puppets) are huge two-headed monstrous puppets, carried on the shoulders by the performers of the ritual. In time, these puppets have been described in various literary works, a brief presentation being made in an article published in “Gândirea” magazine in October 1943, signed by G. Breazul: “The action itself consists of the *conspiracy of the bonjourists* who decide to gather together and play the *Geamala*, a custom prohibited by the ruling class perhaps precisely because, in relation to the Russian ruler and its representative, the Ruthless Militiaman (i.e. captain Costache Chioru, according to the novel of Alexander Antemireanu), it *evokes the Turkish-Arabic Orient*, from where the puppet was brought to us during the reign of Ion Caragea, which is why it is also called Caragea’s Monster Puppet”. In their works, Papazoglu, Ion Ghica and Olănescu describe “*Geamala*” as “a dummy depicting a big woman, six meters high, double-faced, carrying one square mirror on its front and backside, with ribbons instead of head; the body of the dummy was as thick as a barrel. It was woven inside in hoops and had colored paper stuck on the outside; it had a long white-colored shirt, with a red-colored backside and the front apron decorated with flowers; her hands were crossed on the chest, holding a bunch of flowers; it had two hands crossed on the backside as well, but with no bunch of flowers. The *Giamala* was carried by a man placed inside it, holding the dummy by a couple of rings, because it was not heavy to carry, and who danced on the song played by fiddlers: the dance was very slow, with the *Giamala* wandering to and fro... The *Giamala* dance happened in the streets and at fair markets; from Easter and up until the Day of the Dead, people used to invite *Giamala* to dance in their courtyards, in the same fashion as they invite *Călușarii* (Horse riders) today (Papazoglu).”

<sup>9</sup> *Trasul în Vale* (bathing into a creek down the valley) is a traditional custom that is most frequently encountered in Moldova. It was first mentioned in documents dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the night of the Resurrection, right before dawn, girls used to go and bathe into a creek in their village, while reciting an incantation that was supposed to lure the village lads into falling in love with them, and to assure them a lucky love life.

*Moldovei/The Description of Moldova*, written by Moldova's ruler himself, Dimitrie Cantemir (reigning in March-April 1693 and 1710-1711). Cantemir was also one of the most prestigious scholars of his time, the first to realize a written synthesis of the religious and pagan beliefs of the people living in Moldova. Within the third part of *Descriptio Moldaviae* (1714), discussing the Moldavians' pagan beliefs, Cantemir also mentions a custom called *Țurca* - a name still used today, especially in Transylvania, to name *The Dance of the Goat*. The way the Moldavian ruler describes it, *Țurca* resembles closely, more contemporary *The Dance of the Deer*, as folklorists observed a few decades ago (Adăscăliței 1968). Dimitrie Cantemir describes *Țurca* as

a dance imagined in times long ago because of the hate against the Turks. At Christmas, someone puts on a deer head with big antlers to which a mask made out of colored textile strings is added, long enough to cover the legs of the one wearing it. Another one stays on his shoulders, depicting an old hunchback, and this is how they walk the narrow streets, going from door to door, dancing and singing with a lot of people following them (Cantemir 2016:91 [1714]).

Thus, Dimitrie Cantemir describes *The Dance of The Goat* or *The Dance of the Deer*, as some other authors claimed, as a mocking ritual, directed at that time against the Turkish occupation and oppression, rather than a magic rite related to the fertility of the crops or the arrival of the New Year, as it was interpreted by more recent folklore studies (Rosetti, Pop, and Pervain 1964:70).

This historical analysis allows us to see that folk plays have been mentioned since the first consistent documents about Moldova's population and history were available. These practices go back in time a long way, but even the analysis of the first documents mentioning them shows us ritual variations that makes it difficult to gather them all under the same umbrella, in a single category, or to regard them from a unique interpretation. From the ritual killing of a domestic animal described by the Swedish ambassador Welling in 1656 – to Cantemir's dance of the masked couple bantering about Ottoman domination – one can envisage an incredible diversity of aims and shapes that *Folk Plays* represented. Therefore, despite the fact that the inhabitants of the villages I studied performed these winter rituals centuries ago, their aim, symbols and morphology cannot be considered under the guidance of a single unchanging concept.

Despite this evidence, folklore studies (including the most recent ones) have tried to regard *Folk Plays* from a unitary perspective, and therefore miss the extreme diversity of ritual manifestations (Haja 2003). Yet, the troubled history of this region in Moldova tells us something else. Its history has always left a strong mark on rituals, and contributed fully to the morphological, structural and symbolic transformations of the customs performed by small rural communities. In this context, it becomes more difficult to accept the assertion that mummers' plays have been transmitted unchanged for generations, and that what we witness today represents surviving elements of extinct cultures, ideas supported by Romanian (Oişteanu 2012[1980]:85) and also British Folkloristics (Ordish 1891). Instead, I argue that we must study the dynamics of these rituals in parallel with the historical, social, political and economic transformations of the small rural communities that have performed them over time.

### **C. The Dance of the Goat**

#### **1. The Dance of the Goat – History and Social Change**

The *Dance of the Goat*, *Christmas Goat*, *New Year Goat* or simply *The Goat* is one of the most widespread folk plays in Europe and in the world. Recent comparative research (Gunnell 2007), next to the simultaneous archiving effort during the last century (Cawte, Helm and Peacock 1967), revealed the fact that this ritual had been incredibly widespread until a few decades ago, covering all Europe from North to South and on large areas of Russia, too (Warner 1977). Known as *julebukk* in Norway, *julbock* in Sweden, *julebuk* in Denmark, *joulupouki* in Finland, *naarisokk* in Estonia and *hobbyhorse* in England<sup>10</sup>, *capra* in Romania, *коза* in Ukraine, *козел* in Russia, the ritual appears under different names over a gigantic geographic area. A simple overview of this immense material shows us that this folk play – considered simple or even primitive – might be in fact one of the most largely performed and the most successful theatrical performance of humans, viewed more times and by more viewers than any play by Shakespeare, Ibsen, or Sophocles. The reason is that, even within a single village, at the end of December, three or four such teams would be formed. Then, they would perform at least 100 times during the few days of the winter holidays this ritual in the yards and houses of the householders. If we were to gather all the villages where the ritual had been performed and to count all the representations of the *Dance of the Goat*,

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<sup>10</sup> In England, the play where the ritual mask named *hobby-horse* appears is very different morphologically from those of all the other countries mentioned in the list. Still, the ritual mask bears an incredible resemblance to those in the countries mentioned above.

the immediate conclusion is that this simple play was extremely successful for many people during a long historical period. The common element in all the diversity of the *Dance of the Goat* is precisely the strange ritual mask consisting of a wooden head with a moveable jaw, tied with a string that allows manipulation by the person wearing the mask so that the jaws clatter rhythmically or even grab objects like a live animal.

In Heleşteni *comună*, this ritual is named *Capra/ The Goat*; nevertheless, I am going to call it *The Dance of the Goat*, following a long tradition of the Romanian Folkloristics that cemented this term in specialized texts (Rosetti, Pop, and Pervain 1964:67). In Heleşteni, *The Dance of the Goat* is still present nowadays, being performed each winter in three of the four villages in the *comună*: Oboroceni, Hărmăneasa and Heleşteni<sup>11</sup>.

In these three villages, the *Dance of the Goat* became a rite of passage marking a liminal time in the life of young men, and in some respects in the life of girls, too. More interestingly, this transformation seems to have happened a long time ago, given the fact that my searching into the collective memory of the inhabitants of these villages could not reveal any information about a moment in the history of the community when the *Dance of the Goat* emerged from a form of theater into a rite of passage.

I must say I was surprised to see that the current version of the *Dance of the Goat* in Heleşteni has eliminated the traditional goat mask with the nicely adorned blanket covering the man maneuvering the clattering lower jaw of the goat mask, mimicking a goat that bites people from the crowd or other members of the goat band, much to the delight of the audience. While the moving mandible and the wooden goat head are still preserved in the mask's structure, the blanket that once prevented onlookers from seeing who was manipulating the goat, making it behave like a funny, troublesome animal, had been eliminated from the traditional paraphernalia. Today, in Heleşteni, the goat head is a small simple mask hanging on a stick, called *mascoidă*<sup>12</sup> (Vulcănescu 1970:208), embellished with beads, tinsel and small goat or deer antlers. An unmasked man holds the mask in his hand, simply making its wooden jaw clatter, while hopping around on the sounds of pipe and drum music performed by two other unmasked men. None of the members of the goat dance team wears a mask. Besides the abovementioned companions of the goat, the band also includes five or six teenagers, with three or four of them wearing Romanian military uniforms, and

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<sup>11</sup> In the village of Movileni, the *Dance of the Goat*, quite different from the one in the neighboring villages, became extinct around the 1950-60s.

<sup>12</sup> *Mascoidă* – a small mask kept in hand and maneuvered by the person holding it in front of the viewers.



two of them dressed in traditional homespun festive clothes called “Irod” clothes, which explains why these latter performers are known by the name of “Irozi”. One of the six lads is the so-called “*comoraș*” (the leader), who is actually the lead performer and the one establishing the team’s structure.

A simple investigation of the team members’ outfits sent me right away to the recent history of the place. One of the oldest persons I spoke to, Catinca Horneț says: “Young people started wearing military clothes with the *Goat* especially after World War II. Before, they used to wear Irod clothes. But after the war, they started to dress like officers, probably under the impact of the officers’ costumes they had seen, but also because women began sewing less clothes at home” (Catinca Horneț, 94 years old, Heleșteni village, June 29, 2012, Interview). Other villagers in Heleșteni brought additional, sometimes even more fascinating information: “In fact, the *Goat*’s uniforms were first worn to mock the Soviet Army regarded as the military occupant following World War II. So it was rather a way to ridicule the Soviet officers’ uniforms, since Romanians hated them. This kind of irony is traceable in all New Year customs and, above all, in mummers’ plays; in mummers’ performances they are even more frequent than with the *Goat*” (Crișu Aurel, 63 years old, Heleșteni village, June 29, 2012, Interview).

In my discussions with the oldest person I interviewed, I found relevant data about the social status of the performers and about their outfit during World War II and even before. A 96-year old villager from Heleșteni, Voinea Ștefan shared with me his experience as a young bachelor who used to join the *Dance of the Goat* procession:

A.R. - How were you back then? Rich or poor?

Ș.V. - Poor, all right!!!”, he answers with a big laugh all over his wrinkled face.

A.R. - And where did you go with the *Goat* dancers, to the richest one in the village, the boyars?”

Ș. V. - No, boyars did not spend their time in the village back then, when I was a lad. They used to travel to Bucharest, Paris and other cities. But we danced the *Dance of the Goat* for our fellow villagers.

A.R. - Were all villagers happy to invite you to perform the *Dance of the Goat* for them?

Ș.V. – Yes, most of them were glad to see us playing. I remember that the whole village looked like a fairground. Now it’s not like that anymore. Now the lad takes his

sweetheart to the pub or they both stay home watching TV. But in those times, having fun meant going with *The Goat*, *The Deer* and *The Bears*. And I remember that the village was so muddy, with mud up to our ankles. And sometimes I used to tell the hosts not to invite us inside their house, if they wanted to keep their house clean. But there were old people who used to say «*Come and dance inside, because I'm not sure I'll live to see you dance again next year!*» And so we danced inside the house with the mud from our *opinci*<sup>13</sup> splashing the walls all over. Well, we couldn't help it, this is how things were back then in my times" (Ștefan Voinea, 96 years old, Heleșteni village, June 29, 2012, Interview).

Once the Communists came to power, the social discrepancies between performers began to be less important. That was also the time when the fiercest competition between mummers' teams occurred, given the unprecedented demographic boom, too. For the first time, generations with an increased number of children (potential organizers of the *Goat*'s teams), together with the peasants' massive migration to the cities, caused organization trouble for the young lads wanting to create the *Goat* teams. In fact, the logistics required by the teams' organization represents one of the most difficult episodes in the ritual, and it has become increasingly so in recent years. This ritual sequence tells us a lot about the dynamics and the transformation of this folk play over time.

The first stage in organizing a *Goat* team begins with a deal between the young men. In order to form a *Goat team*, at least four or five lads are needed, plus the *comoraș* leading the group. This initial team form is settled after December the 1<sup>st</sup> or even later. In the case of *Goat teams*, organization is easier because these young people are major, aged between 18 and 21, and they may decide for themselves. The participants' age has to do with something very mundane: villagers say that boys could not dance with girls if they were too young or especially if they were short.

After gathering together and deciding how to form the team, the teenagers immediately envisage what options they have for choosing a pipe player – a very important character in the performance because he is not that easy to find and because the *Dance of the Goat* would not be possible without him. Pipe players became more difficult to find at least 25 years ago, during Communism, when many adults went to the city, while the young ones started attending various primary and secondary schools in the city. The new situation

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<sup>13</sup> *Opinci*, peasant shoes made at home from tanning pork skin.

distanced the young from certain activities typical of village life such as that of playing the pipe. Yet, a complete Goat team needs to have six or at least five members, plus the pipe and the drum players, and the man wearing the *mascoidă* representing *the Goat*. Unlike the pipe player, the drummer is easier to find in the village, whereas the one wearing the *mascoidă* could be any of the young men in the band.

Given all these reasons, from December the 1<sup>st</sup> on, the *Goat team* organizer, the *comoraș*, goes searching for the pipe player. Once he finds a possible player, the *comoraș* first asks: „Are you busy?”. If the answer is „Yes”, it means that pipe player is already engaged with another team. In case the player is available, negotiations start right away, and the price for which the pipe player agrees to accompany the team is settled. These negotiations are called *tocmeală/haggling*, and the one accepting the money offer made by the *comoraș* is said to have been *haggled*. Though a mere verbal agreement between the *comoraș* and the musicians, the haggling is in most cases strictly enforced. Money is paid to the musicians a few days before the winter holidays or at least one day before the assemble goes traveling through the village, dancing and singing from one household to another. I was told that the fee paid to each musician ranges between 500 to 600 lei (\$135-\$150) for a pipe player, a bit less for a drummer and even less for the Goat mask handler. The price includes the rehearsals taking place between 5-10 p.m., from December the 15<sup>th</sup> to December the 27<sup>th</sup>.

The three members of the team - the drummer, the pipe player and the *Goat* mask handler - may be older, sometimes even over 60 years old. They are not considered to be true members of the team, as my interviewees told me repeatedly. The current team members are in fact the lads dressed in military uniforms and in traditional outfits. This happens because the three older men are paid to do their part in the show.

The leader of the *Goat team*, the *comoraș*, and the other team members usually compensate the expenses for hiring the drummer and the pipe player from the money they earn during the caroling period. Usually, when the caroling period is over and the costs are recovered, each lad in the *Goat team* remains with a net gain of 600-700 lei (\$150-\$170).

After the start of the Communist period, the sums the *Goat team* would get increased considerably. From the interviews with people in the *comună*, I found out that the peasants becoming part of the proletariat during Communism would give larger amounts of money than others when they came back to the village for holidays. The same phenomenon is observable in Post-comunism. The largest sums – much over the average money other locals

pay – are offered by migrants from Western Europe who go back home for holidays or by those who did successful business after 1989. Unlike the last decades of Communism and Post-communism, the sums offered to a *Goat team* in the distant past, in the interwar period, were much smaller. “We would get a few coins, that’s all”, some of the ex-Goat team members now in their old age, declared. Nevertheless, back then the population was larger and more households welcomed the Goat teams, whereas today the number of houses opening their doors to the band is about 50% lower. I managed to get this information by joining the *Goat team* around the village, as well as from interviews with various team members.

But, for the *Goat teams* in the villages of Heleşteni comună, money is not the only attraction. The *Dance of the Goat* has (or, at least, used to have) a stake higher than the financial reward itself; that is why the *Goat play* involves a large part of the rural community, becoming a classic rite of passage in its own right.

## **2. The Dance of the Goat from Heleşteni Comună – A Liminal Rite of Passage**

An important piece of information I learned during the many interviews I conducted among locals is that “the *Dance of the Goat* ritual is performed by young men of the village one or two years before, as well as one or two years after their military service.” When military service used to be compulsory in Romania, before 2005, the *Dance of the Goat* was undoubtedly linked to the two important events in the life of every young man: the conscription and the discharging from the army. The fact that the lads in the *Goat team* wear military uniforms could also symbolizes that they are about to experience this rite of passage – the conscription and the 365 days of military service, followed by the discharge from the army (*lăsare la vatră*). Undoubtedly, completing the military service represented a major stage in the life of the young peasant man, a true rite of passage in the Gennepian sense.

This assertion is clearly proven by the rural folklore surrounding the moment, including the multitude of recruit songs that may be heard in any region of Romania. These songs deal with several major themes: the pain caused by the separation of the lad from his familiar village community, the homesickness felt during military service, the longing for the family and for the sweetheart back home, and the hardships of the military service. These recruit songs are typically sad and melancholic, expressing the deep feelings of the young peasant who is forced to leave behind his familiar environment in order to join the tough and sometimes brutal world of the military service. All these demonstrate a plain fact: before the extensive

industrialization of Romania in the communist era, most peasants lived within the narrow borders of their village world, which was in fact also the case of other rural communities in many other parts of the planet at different moments in time (Wolf 1966:13). Borrowing a metaphor from the philosopher Alexander Koyre, Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes a series of conditions that contributed to the openness of the relatively closed peasant communities, guiding them ‘from the closed world to the infinite universe’ (Bourdieu 2008:174). Among those conditions, obligatory military service could be added as a factor maintaining a permanent relation between ‘the closed world of the peasants’ and ‘the infinite universe of the urban world’.

For the young Romanian peasant, attending military service was perceived as a true test of manhood, involving two stages. Firstly, during military service the young recruit had to overcome the barriers and obstacles designed to prove his strength of character, his physical strength, his ambition and determination, that is, in one word, all the skills and abilities that define manhood in the peasant’s view. Secondly, for young peasants, the conscription represented most of the time their first long-term contact with the outside world and with types of social relationships other than the typical social network of their own village. For these reasons, the completion of military service equaled a test of manhood and encompassed all the phases that, according to Genep, make up a rite of passage: separation from the familiar environment (the village world), integration into the new environment (the military unit), separation from the new environment (after one year of military service), and reintegration into the familiar village environment, this time under a new identity, different from that of the novice who had not been confronted with the rigors of the military service and the tough urban world.

All these facts show that the *Dance of the Goat* in the village of Heleşteni fits perfectly into the Genepian description of the rites of passage (Genep 1909). The *Goat* folk-play works in this case as a rite of separation of the rural world and, later on, upon return from the army, it serves as a rite of reintegration into the familiar world, facilitating the transition to another significant moment in the young peasant’s life: marriage. Perhaps this is why the *Dance of the Goat* in the villages of Heleşteni *comună* comprises a series of stages designed to prepare the young lad to enter a new phase in his life: manhood, as well as the passage from bachelorhood to the status of married man.

This explains why, besides the preliminary stages of putting up a team and choosing the *comoraș*, which happen in an informal environment among friends, some other more formal phases take place at the end of the year, when the *Dance of the Goat* teams and their leaders have to appear before the whole village community. The first appearance takes place on December the 27<sup>th</sup> each year, late in the evening (after 10 p.m.), when the young people gather at the Cultural Community Center, a building with a large hall and a stage, housing many other cultural events in the village throughout the year. In 2011, the cultural center was rented by the city hall to a club (MMM Club) that would turn the center into a discotheque every weekend. However, even today the location serves as meeting place for the *Dance of the Goat* teams. Once, the music used to be provided by the young people themselves or by the town hall. In recent years, the music is provided by the MMM Club that rented the cultural center from the town hall and requires an entry fee from customers. The club has a bar selling alcoholic and soft drinks, chips, peanuts and crackers.

Usually, the discotheque opens before the *Goat teams* reach the club. The young people gather together at the club and dance to disco music and to the most popular folk songs. Around 10:30-11:00 p.m., one can hear the drum beat and the pipe playing. It is a sign that the *Goat teams* are approaching. Many of the people in the club go out to watch the teams arriving. Usually, the bands show up one by one, with no prior understanding or consensus in this regard.

Once in front of the cultural center, each *Goat team* starts dancing a *hora* (round dance) at a devilish speed, by the music of the drum and the pipes, while the others in the club are watching. There is a total of three to five *Goat bands*, representing the three villages of the comună. Once all the teams are in front of the cultural center, they gather into a huge round dance symbolizing their brotherhood. It is the first time in the ritual that the village community has the opportunity to see the members of the *Goat bands*, though well in advance rumors go around the villages about who the leaders and the band members are, and about the number of teams performing. However, the official “grand opening” of the event is regarded as a moment of great importance by both teams and village community.

After about half an hour of vivid dance, all the bands enter the club. It is time for the festive and formal presentation of the teams in front of the public. The drummer and the piper in each team start playing their instruments while the lads follow them into the club hall.

There they dance again and, at the end, the leaders of the teams (*comoraşii*) are thrown up in the air several times by the members of their teams and their friends.

As in the case of other rituals that mark important moments in the life of a young man, there is a test of endurance to violence and pain that the lad is expected to pass. While the young man is tossed up in the air several times, his companions slap him hard on his back. Sometimes, the slapping can get very rough indeed, and I have often seen the protagonists with their faces contorted with pain after this phase of the ritual. The tossing and the slapping continue until all the leaders of the *Goat teams* go through the ordeal. Only two decades ago, as I was told during several interviews, this ritual used to be even more violent, sometimes ending up with the *comoraş* taken out of the building, thrown into the snow, taken the coat and shirt off, dragged through the snow and literally washed with it by the team members and the young people, friends, neighbors and relatives around him. Yet, after 2005, when the obligativity of the military service disappeared, the event we are talking about has become less violent.

After this harsh moment, the lads in the *Goat teams* go dancing on folk music with their girlfriends on the dancefloor inside the disco. Usually, the other disco dancers gather around in a circle, while the leaders of the *Goat teams* and their girlfriends dance inside the circle before the eyes of the village community. While in the beginning the ones dancing are mostly young bachelors, later on married people - the so-called *gospodari* (householders) -, too, and even village officials such as the mayor and the deputy mayor, might join in, a thing that does not happen on any other day of the year. Householders are men who got married and started a family. At this point, the parents of the *comoraşi* and the *comoraşi* themselves are expected to pay a round of drinks for all the people in the disco. I interpreted this moment as a family acknowledgement of the fact that the young teenager is close to becoming a mature man and that the event should be celebrated together with the entire village community. The first to be offered a drink are the local dignitaries, followed by close relatives, friends of the *comoraş* and, finally, the other villagers around.

This moment is simultaneously a kind of formal acknowledgement of the composition of the *Goat teams* and a way to validate the team members in front of the whole rural community. Once this event is over, villagers do no longer see the Goat teams again until December the 31<sup>st</sup> in the afternoon.

Following this representation, the members in the *Goat team* meet once again between Christmas and New Year in order to settle down the logistics necessary for the two days of ritual, to fix the itinerary, and to do the costumes' final touch. The meeting usually takes place on December the 30<sup>th</sup> (sometimes on December the 29<sup>th</sup>, too), always in the *comoraș*' house. All the team members are obliged to join in. There is a lot of discussion about the route and the houses that are going to be visited, the places where they would stop to eat and to rest. The team usually rests and eats in one of the *Goat team* members' houses, most of the times at the *comoraș*. The food is offered by the owner of the household that had promised to offer a meal to the team members.

The next meeting takes place in December the 31<sup>st</sup> at noon in the house of the *comoraș*. Most *Goat team* members also join the mummers' ritual starting at 5 or 6 a.m. on December the 31<sup>st</sup>. One of the reasons for joining the mummers' ritual is to convince some of the youngsters in the mummers' teams to participate, with their masks on, in that part of the ritual where they accompany the *comoraș* to the *comună* hall. The leader of each *Goat team* is seated on several hardwood stakes carried on the shoulders by four masked men or sometimes by his own team members. Once in front of the town hall, where the officials of the institution and the villagers stand waiting, the leader is put down and the ensemble starts dancing passionately in a circle, accompanied by the pipe, the drum and the clatter of the *Goat mask*. At the end of the performance, the mayor thanks the dancers and the next team begins its performance.

Before a stage was erected in the *comună* hall courtyard, in 2010, the dancing used to happen in the middle of the people, whereas nowadays it happens onstage. Meanwhile, the *comună* hall issues a certificate guaranteeing the team's right to perform throughout the village. To obtain these authorisations, invented during Communism, the *Goat team* used to pay a tax, but around 2004-2005, the mayor decided not to collect that money anymore in order not to discourage these vanishing customs.

After getting the certificate, the teams dance a few times in the *comună* hall courtyard, while the *Goat team* members invite especially young girls to dance. Unlike the *Pantomimic Mummers*, the *Goat team* members do not rush girls or women; on the contrary, they behave like gentlemen. The whole meeting event in the yard of *comună* hall ends around 5 p.m.; the gathering there also means that householders saw them, and they might welcome them in their homes. It is also the moment when elder people with no money may see *the Goat*, since



the lack of financial resources or the little money given for the performance do not encourage the team's visit.

During the event in front of the *comună* hall local dignitaries are subject to mild mockery, women - especially young ones - are fondled publicly, and even elders and grown-up men are slapped with a belt on the bottom, while they desperately try to escape the gang of two or three mummers chasing them away. In the middle of this effervescent mob, *the Goat teams* seem very decent, contrasting with the classic theatrical *Dance of the Goat* from other villages where the main character engages in troublesome scenes, bites the onlookers or pushes the girls from the crowd with the horns. None of these funny tricks are to be found in the *Dance of the Goat* ritual of Heleşteni.

While for the event of December 27<sup>th</sup>, the *Goat team* members are dressed with regular clothes, for the event in front of the town hall, the lads in the teams wear either nice military uniforms or *Irod* outfits. One or two of them puts on a folk costume made out of women clothes. This disguise has a programatic reason: in case there is a household where there are no daughters or young women who could dance to the *Goat team*, the members would dance together. Only the drummer, the piper and the Goat mask handler wear ordinary winter clothes. In fact, this makes the difference between them and the other members of the group, each of the two categories having its own mission and purpose.

Usually, the event in front of *comună* hall lasts two to three hours. This is the only time when the theatrical groups perform in public without being paid for that. Immediately after, the performers begin their walk through the village from one household to another. Their first stop is at the priest's house. Once there, the priest blesses the young men. Winter holidays are the time for party and cheerfulness. But sometimes villagers, and in particular youngsters, drink too much, a fact causing scandals and even accidents. This is one more reason for the *Goat team* to ask the priest to bless them and say a prayer for the team members, so that they may "be protected against the evils of the devil." The priest pays the young men a sum of money for their dance in his courtyard. During the communist era, when the *Goat bands* had to pay a tax to the village town hall in order to be allowed to roam through the village and perform their play, the priest would usually pay the dancers roughly the equivalent of the tax charged to them by the local council.

Each team of *Goat Dance* performers goes to the priest's house in their village, meaning that the teams from Obroceni go to the priest in Obroceni, while the teams from

Hărmăneasa and Heleșteni go to the priest in Heleșteni village, because these two villages share a common parish. Interestingly, the priests in these localities have nothing against the *Dance of the Goat* custom. Although the Orthodox Church has fought for hundreds of years to get rid of what it was considered to be a pagan tradition, nowadays village priests support these rituals and regard them as an intrinsic part of the rural traditions (information from discussions with the priest Dorel Crăcană, 50 years old, Oboroceni village, April 20, 2012, field notes).

After the visit to the parish house, the *Dance of the Goat* performers travel through three of the four villages of Heleșteni comună, namely: Oboroceni, Hărmăneasa, Heleșteni. Movileni village is not on the *Goat teams'* itinerary because that village does not have a team of its own that could, in turn, carol around the other villages in the comună; therefore, the other teams do not visit the households in Movileni, either. The route is established by the *comoraș*, in agreement with the other lads in the team. The drummer, the piper and the mask handler have nothing to do with fixing the route, as they are somehow considered to be hired team members and are therefore expected to follow the team leader's orders.

As leader of the band, the *comoraș* is also the one responsible for collecting the money from the villagers they visit during the journey. Starting with this stage of the ritual, all performances given by the band take place solely for money and on the householders' premises. However, as I mentioned before, money is not the only reason behind the *Dance of the Goat*. The only members of the team who participate in the show mainly for money are the musicians, though even in their case the exclusive financial motivation is sometimes questionable. During my interviews with them, many of them told me that the money they received do not pay for their efforts to sing and walk for two days and nights altogether, and that if they did not love the old traditions of their place, nothing could persuade them to join the ritual.

The stopovers along the route established by the *comoraș* include primarily the households with "marriageable girls" who are, once again, an important motivator for the lads to join the *Goat team*. In fact, as it unfolds, the *Dance of the Goat* ritual in Heleșteni comună would not be any fun without the courtship element. Once in front of a house in the village, the *comoraș* or one of the band members asks out loud: "May the Goat come in"? If the householder's answer is "Yes", then the whole band enters the courtyard. If the answer is "No", the entire procession moves on to the next household.

If the householder invites the *Dance of the Goat* team in, then he and the women in his family have to come out of the house. In case no woman comes out to welcome the *Goat team*, the situation is considered a sign of disrespect. As soon as the host appears on the porch or on the doorway (in the case of a small house), the musicians start playing and the lads start dancing in circle. Some of the lads carry referee whistles with them and blow them to the rhythm of the drum beat, accompanying the piper and the clattering of the Goat mask. During this moment, the other lads shout out loud *Asta-i Ca-pra căprelor, Caaa-praaa Oborocenilor* (Heleştenilor or Hărmănenilor)/ *Here's the Goat of all the Goats, the Goat of the Oboroceni inhabitants* (or of the Heleşteni's or of the Hărmăneni's, depending on team's village of origin). After a short round dance to the music of the piper and the drummer, the lads invite the girls and the women of the house to dance. Women are expected to dance at least once with the lads in the Goat team, but, if they are asked to dance again, they may dance two or three times.

A special moment is when the *Goat band* goes to the house of their leader's girlfriend. There, the girl dances the first dance with the *comoraş*. Then, if invited, she dances with other team members as well. The evening before the day the *Goat dancers* start their ritual, the leader's sweetheart has to bake a big *colac*/braided bread roll and offer it as a gift to her boyfriend right after their dance together. The baking of the bread roll is supposed to prove she is a skilful cook because cooking is considered to be an essential skill of any wife-to-be. Even if they are not team leaders, the other lads in the team are generally welcomed in the houses of their sweethearts, where the band normally stays a while longer so that the "lovebirds" can spend about half an hour together. In some cases, however, the entire team is invited into the house for a longer chit-chat which may last up to one hour. Sometimes, above all in the houses of the girlfriends of the team members, the householder may offer the team a snack, especially when the team has travelled a long distance.

But even if the team is invited into the courtyard instead of the house, the team members are usually offered fruit juice, wine, plum brandy and cakes. During my research work at Oboroceni village, I had the chance to watch all the stages of the ritual described above, except for the offering of the big bread roll to the *comoraş* by his girlfriend. It seems that this part of the ritual was very important in the past, judging by the fact that it was specifically mentioned as a special moment of the ritual by most of my interviewees. Today, however, it seems to have completely vanished. It seems that during the 1950s or 1960s, the bread roll moment disappeared. People born around the years 1935-1940, who had organized

*Goat teams* during their youth, confessed that they had witnessed the bread roll offering or that they had been *comorași* themselves and, as such, had received this bread. During my fieldwork, from 2009 to 2017, I for one have never managed to capture this moment but, interestingly enough, I found it mentioned in all the interviews with villagers older than 45.

After performing the ritual dance with the girls and women in the household that welcomed them, the *Goat team* members engage in conversations with the householder and his family for about 10 or 15 minutes. Sometimes, the conversation is an opportunity to exchange news about other villagers or to talk politics. If the householder is a political leader in the village, such as mayor or deputy mayor, the team members take the opportunity to ask the officials various questions of interest to the community. For example, when the team finished its performance at the mayor's household, the piper of a team of *Goat dancers* I followed during its travel through the village, asked the mayor whether he knew anything about the government's intention to increase pensions. That piece of information seemed to be of vital importance for the piper who was over 70 years old and lived on a small pension as a former cooperative farmer during the communist regime.

Once the conversation is over and right before the *Goat team* prepares to leave, the householder gives the team leader a sum of money. Usually, the master of the house asks rhetorically the whole team out loud "Who is the *comoraș*?" and the leader answers "I am!" The householder takes the money out of his pocket and gives it to the leader of the band, saying: "Thanks for dropping by, guys! Come again next year!" This is the end of the ritual conducted at that particular household, and then the band moves on to the next one, repeating the *Dance of the Goat* over and over again. *Goat teams* travel through the villages of Heleșteni comună for two days and one night without cease, usually until the evening of January 1<sup>st</sup>. The performances are quite tiresome and involve a great deal of effort from the team members, mainly because they have to walk long distances. The distance from one village to another is four or five kilometers and the weather is often bad, with heavy snowfalls, very low temperatures and harsh winds. In spite of all the hardship, the teams perform the ritual for two days and one night, beginning on December the 31<sup>st</sup>, starting in front of the town hall, and going on day and night until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. Then, the teams finally go to the house of *comoraș* and sleep for three or four hours, until around 9:00 a.m. when they gather together to start it all over again until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. the next day, January the 1<sup>st</sup>.

The two days' *Goat ritual* is a real strength and endurance test. That is why it sometimes happens that older members of the band, such as the pipe or drum players, give up or get so drunk that they are no longer able to wake up the next morning and join the team. When that happens, the strongest and most motivated team members continue their journey throughout the *comună* until the next day which, according to tradition, is the last day villagers may receive the *Goat dancers*, usually January the 1<sup>st</sup> from early morning until evening.

### **3. The Dance of the Goat: From Folk Play to Rite of Passage**

One of the questions I asked myself while studying the *Dance of the Goat* from Heleşteni *comună* was: why has this ritual lost its traditional mask dance and turned from a folk play into a rite of passage? To answer this question, I had to examine thoroughly not only every ritualistic phase of the *Dance of the Goat* in Heleşteni, but also the social interactions within this rural community.

My interviews with the elders in the *comună* are very revealing in this respect, mainly because they give us the chance to look, as if through a window, into the past of the village, when people and social relationships were much different from what they are today. The differences between the two worlds, between today's world and the world in which the old people of the rural customary community once lived, also account for the current clash of values and the gap between generations. In its turn, the clash of values itself is the obvious proof of the radical transformations the Romanian rural world has suffered in the time span of only three generations: from a small, self-sufficient farming community, living in relative isolation, to a community that depends only partly on rural economy and which is totally integrated into the global world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the current global village (McLuhan 1962), circular labor migration from Romania to Western European countries and the massive emergence of television and mass media in general have caused a sizable decline of the old values that peasantry once gravitated around. Traditional values have been replaced by new principles that are sometimes totally different and even opposed to those of the old peasant world.

According to these old values, family used to be the central point and the linchpin around which the whole social and economic life of the peasant world was organized (Shanin 1971:14-15). This was a world where the individual was supposed to sacrifice his or her impulses and desires for the sake of family and community. This perspective gives birth to a

system of values strongly linked to a set of principles that did not allow too many transgressions. From this horizon derives peasant sobriety and decency in gender relations, sex and marriage. “In a society where livelihood depends upon the cooperation of members of the extended family, the group must attach strong sanctions to values which minimize friction among the relatives who live and work together”, stated Kluckhohn in one of his studies on values (1951:399).

In this narrow world, the relationship between wife and husband were regulated and supervised by the strict rules of the community. Supervision was even stricter when it came to relations between two young people of opposite sex, and focused mainly on their premarital behavior. This simple fact has been repeatedly noted by sociologists and folklorists in their ethnographic studies. For example, Kazimierz Dobrowolski in his study *Peasant Traditional Culture*, explains how social control mechanisms act when exercised by the paternalistic power of the rural community on younger generations:

The economic dominance resulted in the children’s submission to parents and found its expression in the division and the allotment of work. Food and living quarters were provided in return, but no cash. Paternal authority also controlled endowment at marriage, the disposal of property at death, and generally made the leaving of the parental home and migration in search of alternative work extremely difficult (Dobrowolski 1958:288).

In any case, in small and geographically remote villages such as the villages of Heleşteni *comună*, the social supervision of the marital market and of the behavior of young people was highly valued half a century ago. This fact is revealed by many of the interviews and discussions I had with the inhabitants of the community. For example, a school teacher from the village of Oboroceni, the village where she had worked for more than three decades, told me:

I married my husband 35 years ago. Since then, I have been living here, in Obroceni, where I have worked as a teacher until my retirement. But even now, after all these years, there are people in the village who regard me as an intruder. The fact is that, in those days, when I married my husband, marrying someone outside your village was a real miracle because it happened very rarely...” (Rodica Morariu, Oboroceni village, April 15, 2012, Interview).

A woman from an older generation said:

I got married at the age of 16. This is how things happened those days: women got married at a very young age. I had no idea what it meant to have a relationship with a man. So, I was very frightened by everything that was happening to me, before and after the wedding. When my husband came home from work I tried to stay as little as possible with him, and I used to lock myself up into one of the rooms and come out only to grab a bite. I did that for a couple of weeks and then, one day, I ran away back home, to my parents. But my parents only allowed me to sleep there one night and then they sent me back to my husband, telling me: «*Go back to your husband! From now on, you must live with him, not with us!*» So I went back. I had no other choice. I was very lucky that my husband was a good-tempered man, otherwise he would have probably beaten me black and blue... But he didn't say a word and wasn't mad at me. Then, little by little, we managed to get closer to each other. And now I'm 76 years old and I can say, looking back, that I've had a happy marriage (Viorica Pintilie, Oboroceni village, April 10, 2012, Interview).

Indeed, marriages were not so much about romance in those days and any attempt of the young people to transcend the deep-rooted traditional rules could be brutally repressed. A village of a similar size and degree of geographical isolation as Heleşteni, is Sticlăria, situated in Iași County as well. There, too, I managed to collect data similar to those in Heleşteni comună, regarding the relationships between young men and young women in the past. Costica Curecheru, one of my informants in Sticlăria, told me the following story:

One day, when I was young and still a bachelor, I went to see my sweetheart at her place. I was chatting with her in front of her courtyard and, at some point, her father spotted us from the backyard. He ran to where we were standing, with an ax in his hand, shouting at me infuriated: «You want a girl? Wait, I'll give you one right now, you, bastard!» I dashed like a rabbit, but he still threw the ax at me. Of course, he couldn't hit me, because I was already far away, but I was terribly scared... This is how things went those days. A girl was not allowed to go out of the courtyard after sunset, and girls were always accompanied by their mothers at village balls (Costică Curecheru, 68 years old, Sticlăria village, January 3, 2015, Interview).

This latter piece of information about girls being chaperoned by their mothers at the community balls was repeatedly confirmed by various informants from Heleşteni.

In this section of the study, my assumption is that the censorship imposed by the older people of the rural community on youth behavior, by means of the strict rules of the rural-patriarchal culture, explains why the *Dance of the Goat* has turned from a theatrical folk performance into a Gennepian rite of passage. For, even within the narrow limits of this restrictive and sometimes very rigid cultural framework, there had to be some loopholes that would make it possible for the potential bride and bridegroom to meet and have a minimal prenuptial communication within the limits imposed by traditional structures. This assumption is sustained by the existence of other similar rituals in the villages neighboring Heleşteni comună. For example, in Sticlăria village, there is a ritual called *Bereza* or “the carol of the marriageable lass”. In Ruginoasa comună there is a ritual called *Târâitul*, involving the ritualic visit of the young boys to their sweethearts during two days around New Year. In Vărşand, a village in Western Romania that I studied, there was a ritual called *Mersul cu Hidedea/Going with the Violin*, performed during Christmas and also involving a series of dances organized by young men teams at their sweethearts’ homes, accompanied by violin music (violins are called *hidede* in the local dialect). The morphology, the dynamics and the purpose of these rituals and those of the *Dance of the Goat* in Heleşteni are strikingly similar.

In all these rituals, the young man should prove that he is capable of striding for two days and nights almost continuously, resisting the bad weather and the fatigue, and demonstrating his future wife and her kin that he is also a skilled dancer. The girl, too, has to show her abilities as a future wife, proving that she is a gifted cook, and a welcoming host.

In the past, because the young man in question was usually at the age of conscription, he had to say farewell to his family and girlfriend, and leave to attend military service for one year. Military service and its rigors were seen as a necessary step towards adulthood and as a way for the young man to become stronger and more prepared for his life as a future husband, father and head of household.

The common belief of the peasants was that the military service was not only an obligation regulated by a set of rules and rigors, but also the chance to learn how to handle a weapon, an ability regarded as an act of bravery meant to turn a young lad into a real man. Moreover, leaving for the military camp meant the young man was to be separated from his village – the familiar and friendly environment governed by well-known rules – in order to enter a new environment ruled by the principles of a more complex and larger world. For



many peasant young men, this new world would represent their first longer contact with the town, and required them to adapt to the principles governing a totally strange and unfamiliar universe; when coming back from the army, the recruit would recount that experience for his fellows in the form of the so-called *demobee's story*<sup>14</sup>. This kind of stories played an important role in the life of the mature man, too, because they proved that his knowledge about the world went beyond the narrow boundaries of his village. At the same time, for the conscript and his sweetheart, military service was regarded as a chance to test their patience and loyalty to each other, to prove the depth or, on the contrary, the frailty of their feelings.

Finally, after coming home from the army, the young man resumed his old way of life in the familiar world of the village and, if fortunate enough, he found his girl desperately waiting for him. Of course, "hardened" by the rigors of military life, the young man joined the *Dance of the Goat* ritual once again, this time as a bridegroom-to-be. Now, the ritual would be meant to prove the whole village community that the young man had passed important tests that made him stronger and demonstrated his qualities as a future head of family. This happened because marriage was not just an ordinary event; in the peasant's world, marriage was inextricably linked with procreation and with starting a family. As such, we are dealing with a complete Gennepian cyclical scheme, with the stages of separation from one's usual environment, the stages of aggregation to a different environment, and the stages of reintegration into the familiar environment, this time under a new identity that speaks about the internal changes undergone by the person who had managed to pass successfully through all the stages of the aforementioned rites of passage.

#### **4. Alteration of the Dance of the Goat Ritual in the Post-communist Era: from a Rite of Passage to a Commodified Ritual**

The issues discussed in the previous section, dealing with the *Dance of the Goat* as rite of passage refer specifically to the ritual as it used to be performed until very recently. The period after 1989 was marked by profound political, economic and social transformations, and especially the last four-five years were quite significant in matters of social change; these transformations were reflected in the practice of the *Dance of the Goat*. In their turn, the changes in the morphology and the dynamics of the ritual are also revealing for

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<sup>14</sup> Demobee is a term used in the jargon of countries that have a compulsory military service for all male citizens. The demobee soldier was the one who had finished his obligatory military stage, being also called from then on reservist.

the changes in the system of values within small rural communities such as the villages of Heleşteni *comună*.

The elimination of the mandatory military service in 2005 turned the *Dance of the Goat* into a simple parade in search of money and fun, devoid of its original profound significance in relation with marital market. Of course, the habit has continued by inertia of tradition. Lads in the *Goat team* still wear military uniforms. However, the elimination of the mandatory military service has destroyed the whole scaffolding of the rite of passage. With it, the system of peasant values woven around this custom - according to which the military service was considered a milestone in the passage of the young man towards adulthood - disintegrated. From that point onwards, the lad was no longer expected to leave for the military camp and his sweetheart was spared the sorrow of being separated from him for a whole year.

In fact, the cancellation of the mandatory military service was the last of the waves that began to erode the *Dance of the Goat* custom as rite of passage long time ago. Actually, the first big wave that altered not only the *Dance of the Goat* as rite of passage, but the entire set of values of the rural world, hit right at the start of the modernization of the agriculture and of the villages in Romania, back in communist times. This ample process occurred not only in Romania, but across the globe, with a greater or lesser intensity, depending on the continent, country and level of industrial development. As Teodor Shanin well stated : [t]he process of industrialization has also been a process of depeasantification” (Shanin 1990:143).

Industrialization also triggered a process of labor migration from rural to urban areas. The two facts cannot be separated for reasons other than analytical, and disintegration of rural structures can only be explained by the emergence of these processes. However, an exact explanation of how the depeasantification process occurred would require further and more detailed analyses. Polish ethnographer Kazimierz Dobrowolski tried to explain the dissolution of the traditional rural culture by highlighting four factors that worked together to finalize this process: “a) the growing infiltration into the villages of products demanding higher technical skills and knowledge about how to use them; improved agricultural tools and machinery for example; b) a more intensive exchange of goods between town and country and the breaking up of the spatial isolation of the countryside; c) the development of rural education; d) the wider connection of village populations with social, political and cultural movements on a national scale” (Dobrowolski 1958:298).

Pierre Bourdieu also reminds these four conditions when examining the way peasant society has moved from “the closed world” to the “infinite universe” represented by urbanity, and the complexity of the social relations they involve (Bourdieu, 2008:178). The French sociologist shows how those who are less privileged by the paternalistic rules of the rural world, especially women and young people with low-income, become “the Trojan horse” of the urban world whose rules and values are subtly penetrating the very heart of the rural world, attracting those peasants’ sons and daughters who are less attached to rural culture (Bourdieu 2008: 178). We are not dealing with a fair and peaceful process, but with an invisible form of symbolic violence that, according to Bourdieu, “is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:272), where social agents are aware even when they are subjected to determinisms, and “contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them”(Idem 272).

This form of symbolic violence that began to erode the Romanian rural culture in the early decades of the communist era took a clearer shape in the Postcommunist period. After 1989 and especially after the year 2000, the massive emergence of media industry, and in particular of cable television, has opened the gates of the rural world forever, turning it into a sort of obsolete appendix of the urban world and its principles. And those who stubbornly cling to the paternalistic rules of the rural universe were regarded as losers of a social lottery, having drawn the empty lottery ticket from the urn of social prestige and hierarchy. In his work *The Bachelors’ Ball*, based on the field research Bourdieu conducted in the 1960s in southern France, the author shows how rural matrimonial market, governed by the paternalistic rules of the old rural order, was destabilized immediately after the market economy had succeeded in penetrating even the most conservative areas of peasant culture. In all those rural areas that had stubbornly stuck to traditional marital rules, the young men who were condemned to bachelorhood were precisely those who had been the most privileged by the old rural order: the eldest siblings in the family who were expected to get the largest share of the family possessions and land. However, it soon became obvious that, in spite of their rich dowry, they could not possibly compete with the young men from the city, who had better incomes, better dancing skills and conversational abilities. As a result, these village men became the victims of a system that would otherwise be supposed to protect them and to help them acquire a higher status compared to the other young men in the community.

Somehow, the system that was normally expected to protect and promote them to the forefront of the rural communities was, in fact, condemning them to bachelorhood.

A similar state of affairs is common for the Moldavian villages where I conducted my field research. The communist industrialization forced young people from the villages to migrate to urban centers and to get a job as factory workers. The new status of city dwellers allowed them some degree of independence from their parents and grandparents. The phenomenon continued and even intensified in post-communist times, with many young people starting to migrate to western European countries, seeking for a job. Those who were successful abroad also managed to acquire a better social status than what they would have gained, had they remained at home within their village world. Upon returning to the rural community, they enjoyed a higher degree of appreciation from the local community as compared to their fellows who chose to stay home and work as farmers for a few bucks. The local matrimonial market reflected this state of affairs, as Curecheru Constantin, a villager from Sticlăria village, clearly stated: “When I was young, girls got married depending on the number of sheep and cattle their family possessed. I mean, if a girl, even an ugly one, had many sheep and cattle, she could marry quite easily. Now, things have changed. Girls look for guys with fat credit cards, while dowry isn’t that important anymore” (Costică Curecheru, 68 years old, Sticlăria village, January 3, 2015, Interview). Naturally, this change in the matrimonial market is also reflected in the way the *Dance of the Goat* is practiced today in Heleşteni.

Before the year 2005, village lads knew for certain that they would have to leave to attend their military duty. Nowadays, lads think about leaving for countries such as Italy or Spain in order to to earn good money. Labor migration to Western Europe has somehow replaced the compulsory military service. However, this rule is not a universal one and does not apply equally to all young people. In addition, the money rush specific to the capitalist society has also started to be reflected in the way the *Dance of the Goat* takes place these days. In this respect, a revealing fact is that many of the old people (mostly former workers in state collectivized farms) I managed to discuss with during my field research confessed they were disappointed that Goat dancers were no longer caroling them during winter holidays. For example, a 65 years old woman, former schoolteacher who lives with her mother, told me: “The Goat band has not dropped by our house for several years. As a matter of fact, I can understand them: why would a bunch of young guys want to carol us, two old women! They

prefer to visit households where there are young girls to marry” (Cornelia Voicu, 63 years old, April 5, 2012, Oboroceni village, Interview).

Wanting to check this piece of information from alternative sources, I asked a leader of the *Dance of the Goat* performers why they avoided visiting households in the schoolteacher’s neighborhood. The teenager answered quickly:

Yeah, I know exactly the area of the village you are talking about and that neighborhood, too. Indeed, we haven’t been there for a long time. But my brother’s team was there a few years ago and only one family from all the people living on that hill opened their door to them. The people living there are poor, so it is pointless to visit them, it’s a waste of time to climb the difficult road up there only to carol one household or even none, when we could instead carol at least four or five wealthier families down here and earn good money (Marius, 18 years old, May 15, 2012, Heleşteni village, field notes).

In other words, profitability has become a main component of the *Dance of the Goat*. This element is also taken into account when it comes to baking the bread roll for the *comoraş*. I managed to find out from several informants why bagels and cakes are no longer offered to the *Goat band* or even to young children who come caroling. They all told me that “today, all those who come caroling us, including small children, want us to give them money. If you give them cakes, pretzels or fruits, you will find them thrown in the street around the corner”. Consequently, the offering of the bread roll to the band leader by his girlfriend, once a deeply significant symbolic gesture and an intrinsic part of the ritual, seems to have become outdated.

As in the case described by Bourdieu, the rural matrimonial market in Moldovian villages has changed drastically. Most young people in the village go to study at high schools in cities such as Paşcani, Târgul-Frumos or Iaşi. Those who are better off go to college and enroll in master programs too, usually in Iaşi, capital city of the county. During their studies, young people usually live in campuses and spend most of their time in the city instead of their village. Besides the fact that the urban environment leaves its mark on young people’s way of thinking and on their educational background, most of them end up finding their partner in the city, and not in their village of origin as before. On top of that, many of them become IT literate during their studies or while living in the city. The computer and the Internet are the gateways to a world even wider than that of the city. Online matrimonial

market cannot compete with the scarce marriage offer of the village. The virtual reality bringing together millions of people from different corners of the country - and the world as well - has the advantage of facilitating quick contact, devoid of the barriers of traditional cultures, a situation that obviously stirs the resentment of older generations.

A memorable scene I witnessed while I was doing my research work on the spot happened in Heleşteni. The mayor and a few other locals were waiting for the excavator to carry out some urgent digging works in the village. Usually, when the worker would not show up, the mayor would call his son - a 22 year-old man- who had learnt the excavation craft from his father. That day, after repeated attempts to reach the young man by phone, the mayor learned from a villager that the young man in question was at home and did not want to talk to anyone being very angry because his father had slapped him for spending too much time on the computer instead of helping in the garden. About one year later, I heard that the “angry lad” had left for Spain, where he had found a job as a truck driver.

Under the current circumstances, we should not be surprised that the *Dance of the Goat* as form of networking within the village community has become obsolete. Many young people who get used to the entertaining city life prefer spending the New Year’s Eve in the city, partying in clubs or restaurants in Iași, Pașcani or other cities. Those who are still attracted to old rural traditions continue them in their own way. However, I have learned from several villagers in Heleşteni that the *Dance of the Goat* tends to lose its fervor and, at times, it even contradicts its old status as as a memorable moment in a young man’s life.

For example, in the winter of 2014, I was surprised to see in Heleşteni a *Goat team* whose leader and members were teenagers aged 12 or 13 who, despite being very young, were also very short. The villagers, too, seemed very surprised, and I heard some of them complaining angrily: “What the heck, what kind of a Goat team is that?!? Who are these little boys? When I was young and member of the Goat band, I was a real lad ready for marriage!” A few days later, I had the opportunity to have lunch with the mayor, the deputy mayor and a few other villagers. They all complained about what they called “those Goat (ritual) babies”, at which point I asked the village official a very straightforward question “But you, as community leaders, you can ask them to stick to the old tradition, can’t you?” The mayor felt himself obliged to answer my question and said to me in a meek voice “How am I supposed to do that? Don’t you see that traditions disappear day by day? If I stopped these little *Goat dancers*, there would be no more trace of the custom...” In any case, despite the criticism, the

band of teenagers continued their journey through the village, with their team, and, in the end, every one of them succeeded in gaining a little over \$100.

More, 2016 brought another important change in the morphology of the ritual for the first time in the village history. One *Goat team* of the five caroling throughout Heleşteni comună replaced the pipe player with a hired music band. The band consisted of an accordion, a trumpet and a drum player, with all the musicians brought from other localities; in fact, they were all *lăutari* (traditional musicians) usually performing at weddings.

In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss another ritual - the *Dance of the Deer* - that will give me the opportunity to connect it to other realities encountered on the field such as demographic decline, labor migration, and social inequalities.

#### **D. The Dance of the Deer**

##### **1. The Dance of the Deer – Morphology, Significance and Symbols**

In one of the previous sections of this chapter, I examined how the *Dance of the Goat* became a rite of passage in Heleşteni rather than a folk theatre revolving around a central event: the death and resurrection of the ritual Goat mask. This moment, present in many European folk theatre plays, represents one of the topics that raised interest and aroused the imagination of researchers in the field of mummers' plays for a long time; it also led to many theories, as well as haphazard hypotheses (see for example Beatty 1906). These often contradictory talks emerged especially in British folkloristics (Baskerville 1924; Chambers 1933; Gailey 1969), but were to be found also in folkloristics of countries like Russia (Warner 1977:9).

I did not find the answer to my question in the analysis of this rich literature, but in the discussions I had with the people I interviewed. They declared that in their comună, the *Dance of the Deer* is performed by teenagers aged 10 to 15, whereas the *Dance of the Goat* is performed by young men aged 16 to 20. These discussions also made me aware of the fact that the *Dance of the Deer* is actually a sort of preparation for a larger and more significant ritual – the *Dance of the Goat*.

Of course, in the context of a community, where the subjects follow norms and values according to the criteria they establish themselves, all the locals' opinions are important. Nevertheless, comparing the *Dance of the Deer* with other forms of folk theatre around

Europe, one notices that it is in fact a ritual with a stronger theatrical component and with an internal dynamics that is more fascinating. More, it is the only winter ritual in the area I investigated that comprises the moments of the main character's – *the Deer* - death and resurrection, a moment present in many folk plays in all of Europe, but also within certain plays belonging to the *Dance of the Goat* in other regions of Romania, such as Transylvania.

In the meantime, of all the rituals studied in Iași county, this ritual is rapidly declining as a folk practice. This is probably the reason why the *Dance of the Deer* has been intensely patrimonialized in recent years at the initiative of political and local administration. I will discuss these processes in the last chapter of the study. Here, I describe and analyze the morphology, the significance and the symbols characterizing the *Dance of the Deer* ritual, also known as *The Deer*, as it appears today in the *comună* of Heleşteni.

In all of the four villages in Heleşteni, right after the Christmas fast starts - on the day known as *Lăsata Secului*, on November the 14<sup>th</sup> -, the first preparations for the ritual begin. First of all, the drums are made, and the teenagers wishing to participate in the ritual go to the center of Heleşteni *comună*. Some of them carry drums to prove their willingness to become members of a *Deer* team. In order to do this, on November the 15<sup>th</sup>, they meet a few steps away from the town hall, at the crossroads of two important streets in the *comună*. Usually, the number of teenagers gathered there ranges around twenty or thirty. That moment, the teams are not yet formed. Precisely because of that, the negotiations for creating the teams start there. From the perspective of the organisational skills of the teenagers involved and of the way they build their social networks, this moment is interesting. The young man who wants to become *comoraș* usually lets his friends know about his intention. But he needs to have the prior consent of the parents in order to do that. The parents' approval is necessary because the ritual involves from the start some expenses (covered by the family because teenagers, still minor, do not possess financial resources).

The meeting on November the 15<sup>th</sup> starts with the *comorași* announcing their intention to form the *Deer* teams. That is when other youngsters who do not want or cannot be *comorași* due to financial reasons, but want to participate in the ritual anyway, begin discussing about joining the teams. The *comorași* form their teams according to the drumming skills of the chosen fellow teenagers, but also as a result of family and friendship relationships. Few hours later, the teams are formed and it is known exactly how many *Deer* teams are going to walk around the *comună*, as well as their members.



Once the team is established, the teenager who will be the *comoraş* goes to his father and tells him the news. That moment, father and son plan to look for a pipe player in the village, one that would accept to join the team. Once the pipe player is found and the offer accepted, the teenager's father pays a handsel (approximately one quarter of the final sum) to make the deal. This agreement also involves a series of obligations for the pipe player. One of these is that of rehearsing with the team of the *comoraş* every evening, starting at least three weeks before December the 31<sup>st</sup>. Sometimes, these rehearsals take place even one and a half month before. In recent years, one more person is needed next to the pipe player – the one playing the Deer mask. If in the 1960s both the pipe player and the Deer mask performer were usually teenagers, too, lately they became more difficult to find and people started recruiting and paying grown-ups to perform the role. In recent years, most pipe player and Deer mask performers are older than 50.

With its logistics, the *Dance of the Deer* was not only the preliminary stage of a more important ritual – that of the *Dance of the Goat* – but also a preparation for life, for its problems and difficulties. This was possible by means of socialization and teamwork. Teenagers joining the event would rehearse in the center of the village, and the rehearsals would end in long conversations on various topics, including school and lessons for different school subjects. Nowadays, according to my own observations and to what locals confessed, the rigors and the seriousness of the rehearsals are much lower than it used to be. Many of the *Deer team* today would rather watch TV than rehearse for the *Deer*.

A few evenings before the proper ritual, from December the 27<sup>th</sup> to the evening of December the 30<sup>th</sup>, the *comoraş* and his team members had to prepare the *Deer's* fur and the masks for the final rehearsal. The fur either came from somebody who has had it for years or was made that year by a furrier. The same was true for the *Deer's* head. Those *comoraşi* who did not possess these artifacts had to find solutions for acquiring them. The preparations usually included sewing the fur on a strong fabric that would be easy to wear by the *Deer* mask performer; then the fur was being decorated with multicoloured ribbons and, sometimes, even with a ribbon with the colours of the Romanian flag; the trousers, scarves, helmets, etc., of the members were then ironed. All team members would attend these preliminary activities before the proper ritual took place; finally, the preparation of artifacts also included the last rehearsals with the fur and the *Deer* head put on by the designated performer, and with the pipe player ready as if the proper ritual were happening.

On December the 31<sup>st</sup>, team members meet in the house of the *comoraș* around noon. Relatives also gather there since, in its way to the town hall, the team had been accompanied by the friends and relatives of the *comoraș* and other members of the team. Once at the gates of the *comună* hall, a play is being performed in the middle of the street, then another one in front of the mayor's office employees. Sometimes, youngsters perform a play while local authorities issue the authorization for caroling around the village. Just as in the case of the *Dance of the Goat*, the *Deer team* first visits the priest. The priest offers money to the Deer team and, according to what locals say, there has never been a priest who would not welcome the *Deer*.

Just like the *Dance of the Goat*, the *Dance of the Deer* ritual usually occurs between December 31<sup>st</sup> at 4:00-5:00 p.m. and January 1<sup>st</sup> at 8:00-9:00 p.m. During these two days, the *Deer teams* wander ceaselessly through the entire village, day and night, with just a short break on January 1<sup>st</sup> from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. The ritual presents itself under the theatrical form of sketch, with multiple characters playing various pre-established roles, each conducting a dialogue about the *Deer's* fate. The theatre team usually consists of eight-twelve members and may include five-eight *bear-leaders*, one *dragoman*, one *shepherd*, one *officer*, a pair of *gypsies* (man and woman), a *merchant* (Jewish or Greek), an *old man*, a pipe player and the *Deer* dancer. I saw such a large team with diverse characters in Cucuteni comună. In Heleșteni, the team usually consists of five-six *bear-leaders*, one *shepherd*, one *Gypsy*, a *Jew*, the *Deer dancer* and the *pipe player*. The characters' names show that we are dealing with an ancient play about social realities long vanished from the Romanian countryside.

A detail that fascinated and perplexed the researchers studying this ritual was the name of the most numerous characters in the play: *ursari*/ bear-leaders. The name surprises because there are no bears in the sketch. It is even harder to grasp an understanding of this title as most of the actors involved in the play, including elder ones, know nothing of its significance in spite of upholding the tradition and currently using the term. Vasile Adăscăliței, the researcher who studied this ritual more thoroughly in the 1960s, came out with an interesting hypothesis: "At a first glance, this name seems to be senseless. But the deep analysis of the (local) traditions shows us that (in the past) all wild animal trainers were called bear-leaders (1968:424)." Moreover, one outstanding informant that I had the chance to interview, such as Mr. Curecheru Constantin from Sticlăria village, was able to offer fascinating information about the meaning of the term:

We have two kinds of bear leaders in our team: *boyar bear leaders* and *gypsy bear leaders*. As you probably know, in the past, we had boyars in our village and they were important landlords, one of them owning no less than 200 hectares of agricultural land. They also had many employees at their court. Thus, *the boyar bear leaders* were the most trustworthy men of a *boyar*. They could be, for example, foremen or hunters, and they usually wore beautiful clothing. They were the most valuable workers of the boyar and they were well paid. On the other side, *Gypsy bear leaders* were also working for a boyar, but they usually lived in a wretched hamlet at the edge of the boyar's land, and they performed low-level jobs. They were usually Gypsies and were paid very little, being the poorest people in the village (Curecheru Constantin, 68 years old, Sticlaria village, January 03, 2015, Interview).

Another striking character of the play is the *dragoman*. Nowadays considered an archaism, the word is little used in the Romanian language. It names a translator who usually worked in the service of the Moldavian kings or royal governors during Middle Ages. The character seems to be introduced in the play as an irony, since it had no role other than to play and dance with the rest of the bear-leaders. But he is the only one who could translate for the outsiders the seemingly absurd disenchantment whispered by a bear-leader in the ear of the *Deer*. Last, but not least, *the Jew* is member of an ethnic group almost totally vanished in Eastern Romania. The connection between Jews and the rural community's past is obvious, as they were the main traders in Iași city area during the interwar period and before.

Tragically, during World War II, this ethnic group was the object of *Iași Pogrom*, along with massive deportations to Nazi extermination camps that took place in the Romanian region of Moldova. After these events, most Romanian Jews who survived the genocide immigrated to other European countries, to the United States or to Israel (Ioanid 2008). In spite of this unfortunate history, I was able to observe that the Jew still appears as a character in this local ritual as a merchant trying to make a deal with the master of the Deer in order to buy it.

The presence of another ethnic group - the Gypsies - in this theatrical ritual is less surprising since, after Romanians, they represent the second largest ethnic group in Iași County. During my field research in 2012, I met a group of traveling Gypsies who stopped for a month in Heleşteni and made commerce with the local population, selling and repairing pots and other metal objects in the household. So, they are still an active presence in the villages of Iași County.

The last important character is *the shepherd*, considered the master of the *Deer* in some versions of the play. The economic activity of the shepherd is widespread and economically profitable in the villages of Heleşteni *comună*, and also in the localities around (like Strunga *comună* and Vascani village from Ruginoasa *comună*) where the *Deer* ritual is still performed.

The *Deer Play* follows a simple logical line expressed in a few sequences: one of the bear-leaders or the shepherd first goes to the gate of a village house and asks the householder if he wants to let the team perform its sketch. The bear-leader or the shepherd usually approaches the householder with one simple question: “Do you receive the deer?” If the answer is “Yes,” he opens the gate so that the entire group can enter.

The main character playing the *Deer*, wearing a deer head-shaped wooden mask and a fur covering all over his body, performs an exuberant dance full of vitality, clattering rhythmically the mobile wooden jaw of the mask (quite cleverly triggered with a rope hidden under the fur). Very soon after, the *Deer* falls down because it is sick. Immediately, there is a short dialogue between the shepherd (or a bear-leader in the Heleşteni version) and the merchant (the Greek or the Jew) who wants to buy the *Deer* from its master at a low price. Meanwhile, the Gypsy shows up and tries to steal the *Deer*. That moment, one of the characters accompanying the *Deer*, usually one of the bear-leaders, utters an incantation or a spell into the *Deer*'s ear which has fallen ill because of the evil eye, as we may deduce from the incantation (information collected from the *Deer* team members, Cucuteni, Heleşteni, Sticlăria, Strunga, Vascani, field notes).

In this respect, I agree with some other researchers who concluded that this is the most beautiful and original part of the entire ritual (Adăscăliței 1968:429). It is fascinating mainly for those who comprehend its meaning and are able to connect it to the social and economic realities of peasant communities. The bear-leader begins his disenchantment by telling his own story: how he, King of the Gypsies (the so-called *bulibaşa* or *old man* in some other versions), found the *Deer* in a deep forest entangled in blackberry brambles, thus recalling a fairytale landscape: “I was walking down a path/Trodden by nobody,/On which no one set foot yet,/Beaten by little ants only/And charmed by an ol’ judy/I saw snakes with nine iron fangs,/With nine of steel,/With nine rovers,/With nine hoofers,/With nine soothsayers”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Dance of the Deer* disenchantment, village of Oboroceni, collected by Ion Ciubotaru at the end of 1970s, translation by Mirona Palas

Furthermore, the bear-leader presents a series of seemingly disconnected scenes that may be disconcerting especially to the outsider who does not understand the deeper implications of the play.

Peasants who understood the play in depth explained to me that the *Dance of the Deer* ritual, like many other winter rituals in Moldova, mocks the social evils of village life: “old maids” who became too old for marriage; marital infidelity, especially that of women cheating on their husbands with younger men; decrepitude; rural poverty; and the Greek and Jewish traveling merchants trying to profit from peasants’ ignorance of the grain market. All this data agrees with the information provided by Dimitrie Cantemir who described the *Deer Dance* in 1714, regarding it as a satire against the Turkish occupation (Cantemir 1714: 91).

Unfortunately, although quite widespread in Europe in the past, this ritual was little understood and widely suppressed by Church authorities who perceived it as a senseless and irrational devilish folk custom (Clark 2014:211-213; Du Cange 1678)<sup>16</sup>. In spite of this Church opposition and of the prevalent misunderstanding, variations of the custom are still performed under different forms and names in various parts of Europe, as is the case with *The Ritual Horse* (Warner 1977: 8-9) or *Brezaia* (Beza 1928:11). Nevertheless, the meaning and the development of the play are quite similar in all these occurrences.

In the case studies I was able to observe, including the Heleşteni ritual, the innovative elements, as well as the old ones, came together into an original folk creation illustrating the dynamics and the creative mind of human beings. Thus, *the Dance of the Deer* can be regarded as a social snapshot of Moldova’s past rural world. Not so long ago, Gypsy bear-trainers would walk through villages with trained bears dancing on pipe music; and, one of the most common remedies for various diseases was bloodletting from the tongue or the ear of the sick person or animal. During those times, village girls faced social pressure and a severe local marriage market that pushed them to get married when still teenagers in order to escape the contempt of other villagers. In this narrow world, peasants distrusted the travelling Greek and Jewish merchants who bought maize and wheat directly from villagers in order to get the best price. The peasants were also suspicious of the Gypsies, whose shows they still enjoyed and whose wares were in great demand as they could not be produced in the peasant

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<sup>16</sup> Du Cange opens a window on this world where Church and administrative authorities tried to suppress the ritual, considering it primitive, pagan and a devilish expression. <http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/CERVULA>. Du Cange’s texts referring to *Deer* can be found in the Appendix B.

household. Nevertheless, Gypsies aroused fears. All these feelings and dilemmas regarding strangers were insightfully caught by historian Oscar Handlin:

The peasant, as an individual, welcomed the strangers. But as a member of the community the peasant disapproved [their presence], knowing that these outsiders were a threat to the stability of the village. The myth of the gypsies who ran off with the child had a literal and a figurative meaning. The wanderers brought with them the heady smell of wonderful distances, now and then lured the city or to the open road those impatient with family burdens or with the stolid peasant ways... For in these strangers was incarnated the temptation to acquire a surplus beyond the needs of the peasants' livelihood and that temptation was feared lest in some day destroy the delicate balances by which the village held together (Handlin 1967:464).

All of these social realities, which can sometimes be very burdensome, are embodied in the folk play *The Dance of the Deer*, and are presented to the audience in the *Disenchantment of the Deer*, in a humorous and waggish way.

The ritual comes to an end when the disenchantment stops and the *Deer* miraculously recovers and stands up. That moment, the shepherd expresses his incommensurable joy by performing a short exuberant dance. Right afterwards, the *Deer* begins dancing again and this time it is unstoppable. The bear-leaders accompanying it, wearing drums and colored crests, dance around it in a rhythmic manner, beating their small drums frantically – expressing the joy brought by the *Deer*'s incredible revival.

The supernatural recovery of the sick animal is not new at all, and it also appears in other winter and spring rituals throughout Europe:

Around both the Ritual Horse and the Goat, there evolved an extraordinary dramatic game, a close parallel to many spring and summer rites, in which the death and subsequent resurrection of the animal were performed with much bucolic humor and boisterous play. Here, for instance, is a comic scene from Smolensk's *uezd*, revolving round the supposed illness of a peasant's horse and its miraculous recovery through the agency of an old wise woman (Warner 1977:9).

Another important aspect of the ritual is when the *Deer team* goes through the village and offer performances to any household where peasants are willing to welcome them. This is done by the householder paying a sum of money for the performance of the dramatic game.

The sum of money varies widely: the heads of the village (mayor, vice-mayor, priest or doctor) are expected to pay approximately 100 lei (\$25), the better-off peasants usually pay 50 lei (\$13) and the poor peasants - a mere sum of 20 lei (\$6). It is obvious that the community's social network works as a vessel and a medium for the promotion and practice of the ritual. In the absence of a community that promotes the custom and encourages its transmission to the next generation, chances are that the ritual, already severely threatened, vanishes quickly. Today, more than ever before, rural customary communities face major threats endangering their values, rules and rituals.

## **2. Current Pressures on Peasant Community Ritual: Demographic Decline, Labor Migration and Poverty**

Since I began fieldwork in Iași County, I have repeatedly heard from my informants statements such as: “The *Dance of the Deer* is not performed anymore like in the past.” The deeper analysis of my interviews with villagers revealed two more interesting details. They believe that the repertoire of the ritual is less rich and less beautiful than in the past, and they claim the teams are much smaller and invest less effort in performance. I attempted to corroborate the information from multiple informants by comparing it with data from archives, books and other sources. What I found contradicted my beliefs and assumptions. For instance, upon hearing such statements, one of my assumptions was that many of my informants, especially elder ones, tried to give me a nostalgic picture of their youth as a time when the community was more cohesive, people were kinder, life - more beautiful and community rituals - richer and more diverse. Yet, this was not the case, as I discovered by comparing the different types of data I collected.

First, I got similar statements, from both my oldest informants (65-95 years old), and younger interviewees (26-64 years old). I was surprised to find that even much younger informants gave me similar statements regarding the richness of the village rituals in the past compared to a much poorer picture in the present. I found that in certain villages around the area where I have recorded the *Deer* ritual since 2009, the custom has completely disappeared. According to some of those villagers' statements, this happened mainly within the last two decades after the collapse of Communism, and became even more accelerated after 2007, when Romania joined the European Union.

Second, the *Deer* incantations collected in the 1960s and 1970s (Adăscăliței 1968; Ciubotaru 2010) are richer than the incantations I collected during the last five years, in

different villages of Iași county. The comparison of the *Deer* incantations I collected nowadays in the village of Oboroceni with the ones collected in the 1970s by the folklorist Ciubotaru in the same village, revealed many interesting pieces of information (Ciubotaru 2010). The recent incantation is significantly shorter. Although many verses coincide, others are missing from the incantation I collected in 2012. The missing parts of the incantation are significant in terms of the changes produced in the rural world over the last four decades. These stanzas talk about magic (the description of a fairy-tale landscape where the deer had been found and the magic relationship between the *Gypsy-king* and the deer), poverty (the description of the house and the belongings of the deer's owner), interethnic relations in the village (more interethnic characters in the older version; for example, the presence of the Greek) and romantic love. The owner of the deer in the older incantation version is a *Gypsy-king* (*bulibașa*), while in the new version he is replaced with the *bourgeois*, obviously a more recent presence in the rural world, probably a reminiscence of communist times when the class of the capitalist *bourgeois* were persecuted by communists in the name of social equality. Significantly, the stanza about romantic love has been replaced in the newer version with a scene about domestic violence; in the meantime, smoking and alcohol addiction to cigarettes is included. Apart from this, in the newer version there is one more stanza warning about the possible negative effects of too much alcohol consumption during winter holidays (Appendix C).

Third, in villages like Heleşteni and Oboroceni, for example, during the last three winters, I saw caroling only one anemic *Deer team* made out of four-five children no older than 13, three-four bear-leaders, the shepherd, one *Deer* dancer and one pipe player. In one of the instances, even the pipe player was missing and the explanation was that he had gotten drunk. The more acute problem was the fact that the team could not replace him on the spur of the moment because pipe players in the village could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and had all committed to some other team months before. In most of the sketches presented by these weaker teams, the introductory part of the play was missing together with the characters that usually perform it. Thus, the whole dramatic game had reverted to the scene of the *Deer's* dance, an abbreviated form of the incantation and the final recovery of the *Deer*, followed by the dance of the shepherd. It was hard not to agree with my informants that these sketches were indeed quite frail when compared to other more coherent representations such as the performance I witnessed during the winter of 2009 in the village of Cucuteni. In that case, the team was composed of fourteen young men, none of them



younger than 16, and none (except the *Deer* dancer and the pipe player who would usually keep their roles for many years) older than 26. They presented a very well-organized play with a lot of characters including two Gypsies, an old man, an old woman, a Jew, a shepherd, six bear-leaders, the *Deer* dancer and the pipe player. Unfortunately, during my research, most of the plays I saw were closer to the feeble versions performed in the villages of Heleşteni and Oboroceni than to the cohesive representations done in Cucuteni village in 2009.

Given this situation, I began asking my interviewees their opinion about the transformation of this custom during the last decades. I usually opened my interview or discussion with a simple question, “What do you think about the *Deer team* from your village?” My first experience was that of a rage-filled reaction rather than a rational statement. The speaker would often exclaim, “Is this a *Deer*!?!” or, more categorically, “This is not a *Deer* anymore!” After such an exclamation, the discussion veered toward the right track and the interviewee would then relate his/her story about how much better the *Deer team* used to be when the speaker was younger.

One particular day during my field work, I was lucky enough to assist to a discussion between two men, both of them locals of Hărmăneasa village. The younger one was Florin Chiperi, a 26 year-old sport teacher, who became one of my best friend and valuable collaborator in Heleşteni. Florin had been a *comoraş* for three years consecutively when he was 12-14 years old, in the 1990s. His interlocutor was Gheorghe Aghiorghiesei, the 67 year-old pipe player of the *Deer* team I saw in 2011 in Heleşteni village.

G.A. – There were much more customs (other types of folk theater) and *Deer teams* when I was a child in the fourth grade... This was in 1955-1957. In those days, people gave us much less money than now, but we played the *Deer* more energetically. Now, as I am the pipe player of the *Deer* team, I tell them about all these things and about the powerful way we played it in the past, but they don't really care and only want to rest after going to perform in just a couple of houses.

F.C. – Even when I was a child, bear-leaders played their drums only in the position of a deep squat... This had a meaning. The bear-leaders had to prevent the *Deer* from running. So, if you did not squat all around the *Deer*, it kept running away like a wild animal. This was part of the play. Today's *Deer* teams don't do this anymore.

G.A. – Yes, that is right. Back then, no bear-leaders beat their drum standing up, but only in the deep squat position.

F.C. – Plus, they don't disenchant the *Deer* as long as when I was a child.

Alin Rus – So, the *Deer* doesn't run away anymore today?

G.A. – Yes, that is right!

Alin Rus – Could we say that the *Deer* has been tamed in recent years?

F.C. (laughing) – Yes, we could say that!

G.A. – Year by year, these customs keep disappearing. These young teenagers don't want to learn those things we try to teach them (March 25, 2012, Heleşteni village, field notes).

Actually, this state is part of an overall picture that I witnessed in several other villages where I conducted my field research. Curecheru Constantin from Sticlăria village, gave me a vivid picture of winter rituals as they were held decades ago in his village:

C.C. – We had in our village many other winter rituals besides the *Deer*. I can mention *The Outlaws*, *The Fall of Plevna*, *The Band of Jianu Outlaw*, *The Small Horses*, *The Bear and the Gypsy...* and many others... Now, all of these disappeared and the only one left is *The Deer*.

A.R. – Is this Deer (team) still caroling through the village?

C.C. – My team wandered two days and two nights through the village. Yesterday evening (January the 2<sup>nd</sup>) at 10:00 p.m. we finished. We usually start caroling through the village around 8:00 in the morning on December the 31<sup>st</sup>. We first go to the town hall and, after that, through the entire village, the whole day and night for more than two days (Curecheru Constantin, 68 years old, Sticlaria village, January 03, 2015, Interview).

The same remark about the richness of ritual life in the past was reported by at least ten more peasants in different villages throughout Iași County. All of these remarks motivated me to look for deeper explanations. This is how I began asking my informants how they explained the ritual decline. One common explanation I received was that there is a ritual downturn - the *Dance of the Deer* included in it - and that it is strongly connected to the demographic decline of the villages after 1989. This came out clearly in an interview with the mayor of Heleşteni comună:

Truth is that these customs are fewer and fewer each year. But my generation had a lot of children because of the Ceaușescu's decree that forbade abortions [for references regarding this topic see Kligman 1998 n.a.]. For this reason, there were so many mummers and folk play teams in the village, as well as a strong competition between these teams during winter holidays. Back then, Heleșteni *comună* had around 3,500 people. Today, the population of the comună is around 2,500 people (Hâra Constantin, 46 years old, Heleșteni village, March 4, 2012, Interview).

As I had heard similar statements from multiple interviewees, I decided to check the validity of the data from alternative sources. I went to the Iași City Bureau of Statistics and collected all of the available censuses from 1900 to 2011 for Heleșteni *comună*. The picture given by the analysis of the data proved that the remarks of my informants about the villages' demographic decline were astonishingly accurate. The population of this *comună* increased gradually from 1900 to 1977. That year marked the maximum population boom for this localities, followed by a gradual decrease until 1989, when the decrease became very sharp. Thus, the 2011 census, the last for which there was available information, recorded a village population similar to that of 1945 (Iași City Bureau of Statistics and the Archive of Heleșteni *comună*). It is obvious that the population boom of the 1960s and 1970s must have had a major influence on community winter rituals and thus on the *Dance of the Deer*, too (Appendix D).

In the discourse of my interviewees, this reason was connected with other arguments that might explain the weakening in the peasants' rituals. Following the population decline, the second most frequent explanation in the villagers' discourses was the labor migration to western European countries. The phenomenon was perceived by peasants as having a negative impact on community rituals mainly for two reasons: it drained human resources from the villages, and it changed the mentality of those who left, estranging them from village culture. If the first reason seemed rather natural when perceived by the villagers - as a kind of inevitability or something taken for granted -, the second one was delivered with inflamed comments such as this:

This decline of community rituals started mainly after 1989 Revolution. As the country borders were opened after 1989, many young people leave their villages in order to work in some other countries where they can make more money. The problem is that they forget too easily their village and its traditions. They became too

self-conceited and many of them don't care anymore about our traditions (Petrică Horneț, 52 years old, Heleşteni village, June 29, 2012, Interview).

A much younger man and a labor migrant himself explained the same situation from a different perspective:

When they come back home during winter holidays, most migrants are too tired to wander days and nights through the village as folk players do. Instead, they prefer to stay with their families and to receive those teams who come to their doors.

Moreover, they now have enough money and they are not interested anymore in making, let's say, \$100 during New Year Eve. They make much more money anyway while working in constructions in Spain and Italy (Alin Zaharia, 20 years old, Oboroceni village, December 27, 2011, Interview).

Whatever the best explanation may be, it is more than obvious that labor migration pays a costly contribution to the winter rituals' decline. In order to validate this statement scientifically, I tried to find out the percentage of labor migrants from the total local population. Unfortunately, the data about migration is very hard to get and even state institutions are struggling to determine a fair estimation; the reason for this situation is that people are oftentimes engaged in circular migration, making it difficult to classify them according to rigid categories such as "migrant" or "non-migrant." Aware of that, I used a totally different method in order to get more accurate data. In the course of an entire day, I intensely interviewed one person from each village of Heleşteni comună which worked either in administration or in a local school, and practically knew the entire village population by name. With the census data that contained all the households and family members in the village in front of us, I asked questions about the migration status of each family member. This way, the cohesive village network, doubled by village gossip, provided useful information.

Those outstanding members of the four villages whom I interviewed were able to deliver accurate data about how many people migrated to foreign countries, to which countries, for how many months or years, and in what field they were working. In the period between April the 24<sup>th</sup> and May the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012, I was able to apply this method to all four villages of Heleşteni comună: Oboroceni, Hărmăneasa, Movileni and Heleşteni. Thus, I was able to find out that 12-15% of the population was or still is engaged in international labor

migration. Furthermore, this represented one of the most active parts of the village population, usually comprising people between 18-35 years old. This is exactly the population sample responsible for transmitting the rural customs and knowledge related to winter rituals, or actively involved in the performance of these rituals.

This conclusion was reinforced in my field observations in the evening of December the 27<sup>th</sup> 2011 in the village of Heleşteni; I was filming the preparation for the *Deer* ritual, including the sewing of the *Deer* fur, the decoration of the *Deer* mask and the rehearsal for the roles in the play. All of these events happened in a small house in the village. Inside that house, there were two elders who, besides doing all those previously mentioned activities themselves, taught the four young teenagers how to do all of those things alone. I learned from these elders that the parents of the children had all left to Spain as labor migrants and could not return home during winter holidays. As a result, the elders had to get involved to ensure the cultural transmission of knowledge and skills related to ritual practices. This was what I saw and learned while witnessing and filming the manufacturing process of the *Deer* costume. During this event, an old man who was the soul of this entire activity, told me:

The parents of the children you see here are working in Spain. My son-in-law works in construction, and my daughter in a restaurant. And these children, including the *comoraş*, are my grandchildren, and I take care of them while their parents are there. There is no other way for me to help them because my pension is very low. I grow a pig all year long and then I sell it for almost nothing just before Christmas. I get 400 lei (\$100) for it, nothing more. But at least I know I still do something for my children... This year, my son-in-law wanted to come home for the holidays, but his boss could not let him go. So that's why I'm here, teaching my grandchildren do the *Deer*. I even bought a Deer head from a craftsman in Costeşti village. I paid 800 lei (\$200) for it, but we'll be using it for at least a few years. Together with the pipe player, we sew the Deer's fur and we teach these children how to do it for the time when we'll no longer be able to (Ion Scripcaru, 76 years old, Heleşteni village, December 27, 2011, Interview).

The third reason often mentioned in relation to the weakening of winter rituals was poverty. The common explanation of my informants was that villagers have no more money to offer to the ritual practitioners when they came to perform in the householders' courtyards. In spite of this explanation, it seems quite plain at a first glance that poverty was actually one of the

more complex and complicated aspects of village life that were sometimes very difficult to analyze. Initially, I received too many contradictory statements about poverty in the past versus poverty in the present. It was mainly the young villagers who emphasized some aspects of village poverty after the collapse of Communism, while the elders presented remote and fragmentary images of their excruciating experiences of famine and poverty during, after and even before World War II. I heard less contradictory statements about the period of Communism. During Communism, the majority of my interviewees agreed, “People in the village were pretty equal. There were nor very rich people in the village, and neither very poor.” The analysis of all this information brought me to the conclusion that poverty today was not deeper than in the past. In spite of this, in the past villagers were more committed to open the doors to folk actors and to pay them some money.

In order to unravel the complicated “mystery” around the issue of poverty in the villages, I had to put together a lot of information from many interviews, discussions and participant observations that I collected during my several trips to Iași county.

For the purpose of getting a clearer picture of how carolers are paid, I once tried to challenge the mayor of Heleşteni *comună* - a villager whom I was better acquainted with as he was hosting me.

A.R. – I saw you giving 100 lei (\$25) to these teams. It seems to me a bit too much. Why don't you give them less?

C.H. – I have to give them at least this amount because, you see, there are many members in a band like the *Deer team*.

A.R. – What would happen if you would give them 20 (\$6) or 10 lei, let's say?

C.H. – I cannot do that!

A.R. – Why not?

C.H. (laughing) – The next day, the entire village would gossip about me.  
(January 2, 2011, Oboroceni village, field notes).

But, just as there are some people able to pay 100 lei for a team that entertains them, others are not well-off since they still make a living by working their small plots of land. Today, this work is usually unprofitable mainly because giant grocery producers from the European Union and America such as BASF and Monsanto are able to sell the same products at much lower prices. Thus, the poorest peasants are ashamed to receive the carolers during winter

holidays as they are not able to afford paying a decent amount of money to folk play teams. This perspective was clarified in an interview with the head of the *Deer* team in the village of Sticlăria, taken on January 2015.

Alin Rus – Are there many people who don't open the doors for you when you want to perform your sketch for them?

Curecheru Constantin – Yes. There are some people who don't receive us because they have no money. They want to receive us but they have no money at all to give us.

A young man from Mr. Curecheru's team – The householder is ashamed to get out and to tell us he has no money. Because of that he would rather keep his door locked.

C. C. – Or they send a child to tell us, "We cannot receive the carolers because we have no money..." However, many people are very happy and receive us with wine, cakes and beverages and they also give us money.

A.R. – How much money do you get from them?

C.C. – Some people give us 100 lei (\$25) or 50 lei, more rarely we get 200 lei (\$50) and there are, of course, people who give us 10 lei (\$3). But actually we don't have high pretensions. We say *Boda Proste* ["Thanks God!" in an old Bulgarian dialect n.a.].

A.R. – But, for example, I know in the village there are elders with small pensions, ex-workers at the communist state farms. How much do they give you?

C.C. – Indeed, there are people like these. But, most of them have children who work in foreign countries and they give us more money. For example, I have eight children and all of them are in Italy.

(Curecheru Constantin, 68 years old, Sticlăria village, January 03, 2015, Interview).

During my field research I had the chance to meet people who could not afford paying the prices mentioned above to watch the teams of folk artists dance and sing in their courtyards. One interview with Mr. Petru Scripcaru, an 84 year-old man who is also sick and has a 600 lei (\$150) pension, was very conclusive in this respect.

Alin Rus – Did the teams come to carol you during the previous winter holiday?

Petru Scripcaru – Yes, the *Goat team* came and performed here in my courtyard.

A.R. – How much did you pay them?

P. S. – I paid them 10 lei... (after a long pause and a kind of embarrassed grimace on his face, he continued) Maybe some other people paid more, but unfortunately I cannot afford more.

A.R. – What about the *Deer team*? Did they come to your door? I am asking this because I know there was a *Deer team* that walked through your village.

P.S. – No, they did not come. Only one *Goat team* came because the son of my brother was the head of this team and I asked him in advance not to forget about me, as I wanted to see his team perform.

(Petru Scripcaru, 84 years old, Heleşteni village, June 26, 2012, Interview).

This interview became relevant especially when corroborated with other information I had collected on the field, above all the statements made by the heads of the teams during my discussions with them. It became clear that the teams had little motivation to perform for poor elders such as Mr. Scripcaru. I learned that there are two primary motivators that push the teams to perform these rituals in the villagers' homes: money and girls. If there is a wealthy family that gives good tips to the carolers, the team is very eager to go perform their ritual in front of their householders. If the tips are small, but the householder has beautiful young daughters, especially unengaged, who would dance or talk to the young men performing the rituals, they would also be very happy to go there. Nevertheless, there is little motivation for them to go to some of the elders' houses where they get little money and don't have as much fun. Of course, there exist some other lesser motivations that can entice teams to perform for elders, too. One such example is family obligation and reciprocity regarding certain relatives; such an instance could be observed in the interview with Mr. Scripcaru.

The previously stated perspective about the peasants' explanations that "poverty led to the rural ritual's decline" was a bit more distinct and, at the same time, more nuanced and complex. As a conclusion to my analysis of the *Dance of the Deer*, I suggest that the reason rituals are declining is not poverty itself, but rather a combination of poverty and social inequality. Social inequality grew deeper after the collapse of Communism and mainly after Romania joined the European Union; as a result, more villagers were able to migrate easily and get jobs in western European countries. As some peasants became richer after 1989, they were also expected to pay more for the teams of folk plays who caroled them. Additionally, I was told stories by labor migrants who showed off by offering big sums of money to the performers of winter rituals. All of these things raised the price for the winter rituals



performances and divided the rural communities into people who receive the carolers because they can afford to pay them, and people who cannot afford it.

Finally, all of these factors lead to a deeper atomization of the community – a process that has been negatively reflected in the practice of winter rituals. Becoming aware of these transformations, many local leaders decided to perform certain actions in order to safeguard the customs, including the *Dance of the Deer* – one of the most important and most threatened by extinction. But I am going to talk about all this in the last chapter of the work. For the moment, I will start discussing about another ritual from Heleşteni *comună*: the pantomimic mummers.

## **E. Pantomimic Mummers – Mummers’ Parades and Mummers’ House-Visit**

### **1. Mummers’ Plays**

This section broadly describes the ritual performed by what I called *Pantomimic Mummers*. Even if this name is not used by the inhabitants of the Heleşteni *comună*, I use it in this chapter precisely to distinguish this ritual from the more obviously theatrical plays such as the *Dance of the Goat* and the *Dance of the Deer*. But locals prefer the simpler version – that of *Mascați/ Mummers* – to describe this local custom. Because characters from other winter rituals are also masked and could be called *mascați/mummers*, I use “*Pantomimic Mummers*” to refer to a less formal style of winter ritual performance.

*Pantomimic Mummers* are part of a very complex ritual that could be divided into several distinct moments: the morning parade on the village streets, the meeting in front of the *comună* hall, and the house-visit, accompanied by its permanent expressions: *speech disguise* and *guessing-game*. The ritual finishes with the general meeting in Oboroceni village, at the crossroads, on January the 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 2 p.m.

In the first chapter of this work, when talking about the first day of field research, I described such a group’s visit to the house of my hosts in Oboroceni village, Heleşteni *comună*; that moment corresponds only to one part of the complex ritual of pantomimic mummers, a ritual that Romanian folkloristics does not know too well and has not studied enough, at least concerning the way it is performed in the villages of Heleşteni *comună*.

Romanian folkloristics has largely debated the mummers’ phenomenon, and created consistent studies on this topic, but none of them described thoroughly a ritual resembling the one I discovered in Heleşteni *comună*. Folklore studies on masks and masking in Romania

were rather concerned with the elements common to all mummers' rituals, and divided those masks and their corresponding rituals in typologies, without offering a step by step presentation of some case studies; thus, they merged local differences altogether by reducing them to a general model.

Romulus Vulcănescu's substantial work *Măștile Populare /Folk Masks* (1970), uncover such an approach; other studies of smaller dimensions that follow the same approach are Retegan's study on *Dracii din Valea Țibleșului/ The Devils in Țibleș Valley* (Retegan 1957), Lorinț and Eretescu's article about masks in familiar life habits (Eretescu and Lorinț 1967) and Constantin Eretescu's article on the origin and functioning of the *watch-eye masks/măști de privegi*<sup>17</sup> (Eretescu 1968). But the process of dissolving the individual case and imposing a general and generalizing typology is not only related to Romanian Folkloristics; examples as such are to be found in other works in the Folkloristics, in many countries, all of them trying to find typical marks and models rather than to explain and analyze the meanings practitioners give to these customs (see, for example, Lommel 1972). Such approaches contributed to the exclusion of a whole series of important elements of particular rituals, as well as of the voices of the participating subjects that could have offered precious details about their hidden differences. Interestingly, the same observation was also made by other researchers studying this type of cultural forms in other geographical regions in Europe:

The lack of documentation concerning the dialogue within the context of mumming can be attributed to the fact that collectors have been limited in their view, focusing only on the custom itself, on the topsy-turvy behavior of the players, and the more obvious masking and costumes, rather than on the actual dialogue that sometimes takes place (Larsen 2007).

The practice of mumming is mentioned in these written records [Swedish folklore archives], but seldom described in any detail. Personal stories and experiences are not mentioned at all. By and large, those who represented the social and cultural hegemonies were the ones who created the sources. They tell us that masking and disguising occurred, but do not give any insights into their cultural significance. They

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<sup>17</sup> *Măștile de priveghi* are worn by practitioners of a rural ritual in which the watch of the dead body before burial was accompanied by a series of pantomimic representations made to stir up humor

give us a glimpse into the phenomena without giving any detailed descriptions (Knuts 2007:111).

However, the research into old archives showed that the study of mummers in Europe brings in front of us a complex phenomenon rooted deeply in the history of rural culture on the continent, and little understood by the first religious figures observing and describing these practices centuries ago, as we deduced from the texts systematized by a philologist such as Du Cange. What we are actually dealing with is a rich customary complex, with many variations and with striking similarities between rituals situated in different moments in time and place (Gunnell 2007b); Halpert and Story 1969).

In the next pages I leave the analysis of mummers' literature aside, as I will largely discuss it in the fifth chapter, and I start describing the pantomimic mummers' ritual in Heleşteni *comună*.

## **2. Mummers Parade on the Villages' Streets**

Unlike the *Goat* and *Deer teams* that required a detailed logistics, organizing *Pantomimic Mummers* is easier and involves less preliminary stages between the proper ritual that happens on the interval between December the 31<sup>st</sup> and January the 2<sup>nd</sup>. In the meantime, one could observe that unlike *The Dance of The Goat* or *The Dance of The Deer*, *The Pantomimic Mummers* involve a higher diversity of the age and social status of the participants. Thus, *Pantomimic Mummers* can be performed by householders, married people, both men and women, sometimes even older than 50. Nevertheless, the *Pantomimic Mummers*' ritual does not exclude youngsters aged 14 to 18 or even children aged 9 to 13 who, for various reasons, have not organized *Goat* or *Deer teams*. All these aspects speak about the inclusiveness of the pantomimic mummers' ritual, accepting men and women, as well as people with very diverse ages, from 14 to 70. Despite all this, the most common age category is that between 21 and 35. This age interval is mainly valid for the first stage of the ritual (in the morning of December the 31<sup>st</sup>), whereas later in the same day and the following days, in the next stages of the ritual, the other ages mentioned above may well be present among mummers.

Just as in the case of the *Goat* and *Deer* dances, the pantomimic mummers' ritual comprises two kinds of performances. The first one is public and it is joined by the whole group of mummers in the village or even in the entire *comună*. These performances,

involving numerous mummers, take place on the streets of Heleşteni, in front of the *comună* hall and, finally, in a place already decided upon in Oboroceni village. This kind of ritual expression is perfectly defined by the English term *pageant* because of the public parade it includes. The second type is private and takes place in the courtyard and in the house of the householders, being performed by much smaller mummers' groups visit (usually 3-8 mummers). The folklorist Herbert Halpert called this ritual sequence *house-visit* (Halpert 1969), and I adopt the term for the rest of the present work.

The ritual starts with organizing three large mummers' teams, one in each village in the Heleşteni *comună* (namely Hărmăneasa, Oboroceni and Heleşteni). The village of Movileni is an exception, as they don't have this ritual. The participants in the ritual from each of the three villages mentioned above first meet in the evening of December the 30<sup>th</sup>, around 7-8 p.m., in the center of their own village. That is where they settle the place and the time for the meeting that is supposed to take place the second day. All those who want to join the play must design or buy their own mask and costume. These two elements are the necessary and sufficient conditions to join the ritual. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that there are significant differences between the participants' mask and costumes. If some of them simply put on a cheap Halloween mask they bought in the supermarket or just cover their face with a piece of stocking, dressed with old fashioned clothes usually worn by the opposite sex, others make a giant effort, investing a lot of energy and money onto really artistic masks and outfits.

In recent years, labor migrants in Western Europe who come back home and join the ritual do not design their own masks and costumes anymore, but buy them instead from other locals. This phenomenon urged local craftsmen to design beautiful masks that could be sold before New Year. Migrants also bring materials – especially beads – from the countries where they work (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece) that could be used for manufacturing the masks.

Older interviewees told me how their masks used to be done in the past, when the choice of available fabrics (ribbons, beads, mirrors, etc.) was not that impressive. Some of them still have such “ancient masks” and they serve as landmarks for memory. Besides these, by looking at photos taken in the past, more than half a century ago, I observed that masks were much simpler, made out even of tree bark or coloured cardboard. After Romania entered the European Union and the migration of the peasants around Iași county to the West

increased, masks became transnational. Generally, the mask's helmet is made of sheep skin produced and manufactured in Heleşteni by local craftsmen; meanwhile, the beads and the ribbons are brought from supermarkets in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, but are often made in China.

After the mummers' preliminary meeting on December the 30<sup>th</sup>, once the meeting place for the big group the day after is settled, participants separate and each of them goes home. They re-group the next morning, first in smaller groups of 4-8 persons. These small groups come together that morning in one of the participants' houses. They also bring the clothes, masks and bells that they are going to wear. Usually, the meeting time for any of these groups is 4:30 a.m. on December, the 31<sup>st</sup>. There is also a pragmatic dimension in the small group formation. Participants help each other in sewing and tying certain artifacts on the costumes and masks (such as bells, belts or *bârnețele*<sup>18</sup>). In most cases, these preparations take from half an hour to one hour. Afterwards, the groups of mummers – already wearing their costumes – arrive, one by one, at the place they decided. They often light a fire and, around it, they warm up and drink a shot of palinca before walking together through the village. On some occasions, temperature went as low as -20°C; that was the case at the end of 2014. In such conditions, fire and drink are necessary to cheer spirits up. The fire moment lasts around half an hour, until around 5:30, when the mummers' group starts parading around the village. To the very noisy bells, mummers add rattles – wooden boxes with a handle that produce a deafening noise when the handle is rotated.

At that early morning hour, not too many locals are on the streets, and the mummers' noisy group is 'welcomed' only by dogs barking and poultry cackling. But they say that this noisy parade at around 6 a.m. lets the householders know the New Year is getting closer. Another idea I have heard about this mummers' parade is that it is meant to send bad spirits away and to announce that the New Year is better than the one about to finish. After about an hour of walking on the village streets, mummers gather together in front of the house of one of them where they are served *țuică* and wine, cookies and cold meats: *cârnați* (sausages), *salam* (salami), *caltaboș* (pork sausage made with rice, onion, pepper and pork intestins) and *măiș* (pork sausage made with pork liver, pork fat, pepper and onion). This revigorating moment gives mummers the energy to continue their pilgrimage around the village for the coming hours.

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<sup>18</sup> Bârneață - a very resistant hemp girdle decorated with girdles. It is worn around the waist or across the chest during the ritual.

Only now does the more exciting and in the meantime tensioned part of this ritual stage begin, after 7:30 a.m., when villagers start to show up outside their homes. Those seen by the mummers on the village streets are being chased by the entire large group of masked people. If they catch a villager, they hit the person with their stitched scarves, dolls, brooms, or old handbags that they possess. The sequence is repeated even in some courtyards where householders just go out to watch the noisy cortege in the street.

I once saw three persons in a courtyard, an old couple of about 75-80, and their son, aged around 40-45. Three of the masked men left their group and entered the courtyard. They „furiously” ran to hit the young man, one attacker armed with a broom and the other with a stitched scarf. The third mummer grabbed him from behind and tried to keep the victim’s hands still. In a matter of seconds, other 6-7 mummers entered the courtyard. They seemed to prefer the same victim – the younger man. Another mummer started hitting him with an old wooden handbag, while the others just pushed him against the wall. The victim tried to defend himself by running and pushing his aggressors. But his opposition increased the other ones’ furor, while the hits became stronger and quicker. Nevertheless, the man kept laughing and continued to fight his attackers.

This happened during the first minute of the confrontation. Immediately after, the old couple was also attacked, after having tried to stop several mummers from hitting their son that hard. The woman was hit with the scarf on her back and bottom. The man was pushed and harassed, but managed to confront the attackers quite well, hitting them back. Despite his age, he even grabbed the horns of one of the mummers who was wearing a male goat mask, hitting him to the ground. But other two mummers counteracted, surrounding the old man from behind and making him free his “victim”. This household “attack” was one of the first ones I witnessed closely and I was, for sure, very shocked by the whole episode. What confused me most was the final attack on the old couple. First, the whole scene of the “attack” seemed extremely violent and long. Later, I realized the feeling of time expansion was probably caused by the effect violence had on my own mind.

Luckily enough I filmed the whole scene from beginning to end. While re-watching it, I could observe some details that I had not noticed when recording. When the mummers hit the old woman with the scarves, I saw a decrease of energy right before the hit; they would not hit with all their force so that what first seemed menacing finally turned out to be a series of relatively light strokes. The same stood for the hits the old man had received. The only one

seriously hit was the young one. Yet, despite the aggressiveness of the attack, I saw him laughing at the end, quite satisfied with the way he had defended himself. The faces of the two elders were just as smiling and content. More than that, after a few successive views, I realized that the whole scene lasted exactly two and a half minutes. Watching the recording with my friend, Florin, I received pieces of information that helped clarifying the whole episode. One such information was that the two mummies attacking the old couple more strongly were, in fact, their grandchildren, whereas the ones attacking the young one were his friends or neighbors. One of the statements I have heard most often was “Mummies attack especially those whom they know better”. So, in this respect, the situation we are talking about seemed obvious.

Another statement I heard was “Mummies always attack only those villagers who do not mask themselves and especially the men who could normally join the group, but decided not to.” Despite the fact that this idea seemed to be one of the functioning principles of the mummies’ group, it was later contradicted by one of the scenes I watched during the same morning. Around 9:00 am, I saw a group of about eight-ten masked children, aged 6 to 10, who approached the large mummies’ group that I had been following since early morning. Before merging into the group, I asked Florin, what do the masked children do among the adult mummies. Florin explained, to my surprise, that the children’s group joins the mummies later and only for a few hours, usually between 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

The moment was followed by yet another surprise, meant to contradict the principle I did mention above. One of the masked children shouted something at one of the older mummy. That mummy grabbed the child’s hand and hit him to the ground. Shocking enough but, I learned, amusing for the ones watching, the child – not more than 10 years old – jumped to hit the older mummy back. The mummy managed to avoid and hit the child to the ground violently. The child hardly abstained from uttering a cuss and was about to be hit once more. But that happened when more mummies in our group called Elvis (that was the mummy’s name) insistently and urged him to stay away from the kid.

I managed to record that scene, too, and I was proud to present it later to my hosts as a sign of victory and as a counterexample for the idea that “mummies only attack un-masked people”. While watching the scene, everybody in the house smiled indulgently and declared: “The problem with Elvis is that he cannot be regarded as the other mummies in the *comună*. He had an accident when he was a child and because of that he doesn’t judge clearly. Had

things have been different for him, he would not have hit another mummer and especially a child.” This statement made me reflect, and afterwards I started to interpret the mummers’ actions in a less rigid and inflexible way.

There is clearly a pattern in the mummers’ group actions, and each mummer’s behavior was mostly following this general pattern. Such an example is the “attack” I witnessed in the first household, later seen again in other places and with slight variations. Usually, the victims were younger men, not older than 50, whereas girls and women were rather groped, both brutally and erotically. But the assaults would not last more than 2 or 3 minutes in these cases either, and the girls would also hit back, slapping, pushing and sending the mummers away. I have even seen women defending themselves with flexible hazelnut or willow twigs, and thus hitting the shameless mummers.

Anyway, the fact that puzzled me most was that I have not seen any villager under assault that would run inside the house or somewhere else out of the mummers’ reach. Even in cases of more agile men who were attacked and managed to escape the mummers, they later came back to them willingly only to be chased again and to restart the initial “play”. The attack, the confrontation and the defense proved to be also some of the principles of this complex ritual. Apparently, the fact of going out in the street or out of your house into the courtyard is a signal indicating that you are willing to join the ritual, unmasked, and implicitly to be chased afterwards. I am stating this because I saw people who stayed indoors with the door shut even when mummers passed by their houses.

Nevertheless, I have also seen situations where innocent victims who had not expressed any wish to join the ritual fell into the mummers’ hands out of the blue. Such was the case of a man around 35 years old who, together with his children – a 9 years old girl and a 5 years old boy – was obviously going somewhere in the village to solve a personal business. Caught in the middle of the group, he was surrounded by around five mummers who snapped him right away with handbags, scarves and twigs. The man tried to defend himself and also to calm down his crying little boy. When the boy started crying, the mummers stopped and two of them came closer, taking their masks off; upon seeing his neighbors, friends or maybe relatives, the little boy started smiling. As a “reward” for having to unmask themselves, the two pinched the boy’s nose and this caused another round of crying. Unlike the boy, the girl fought the mummers courageously, pushing and hitting. As a result, they did not harass her too much; in my opinion, this happened because they admired



her courage and determination. After such an experience, I concluded that, for the locals of Heleşteni, mummings are, in a way, just like the events in one's own life. In order to overcome them, one has to face them bravely. Sometimes, running away or trying to avoid them only increases their aggressiveness. Therefore, even a little child should learn this, despite the fact that the life lesson is harsh.

Another similar event reinforced my conclusion. Usually the day of December the 31<sup>st</sup> was a real blessing for me as an anthropologist, with tens of events one after another; but it was also a marathon. Not only was I supposed to wake up at 4 a.m. and go to sleep the following day around 3:30-4:00, but I also had to ask my hosts and the friends I had made in the village to ease my contact with certain groups joining various rituals or to help me drive around faster, on my way from one event to the next. December the 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 was just the same. From 4:00 to 6:00 a.m., I joined the mummings' parade in Heleşteni. At 6:00 a.m, Florin drove me – with my own car – to Ruginoasa *comună*. Then he came back to Heleşteni to join the *Pantomimic Mummings'* ritual, and I was left alone to film the ritual of the *Mummings' Battle* or the *Battle with Clubs*. Since the event was over at around 8:30 a.m., the only solution left was to call my hosts and ask them to pick me up from Dumbrăvița, a village part of Ruginoasa *comună*, eleven kilometers away from their house in Oboroceni village. My intention was to go back to Heleşteni in order to watch the mummings' ritual that was still going on in the streets. Since my hosts were busy with various home tasks, they sent their elder daughter, Evelina, to help me. Back then, Evelina was a student at Iași University, and she had come home to celebrate the New Year with her family.

Approximately half an hour after my phone call, Evelina got to Ruginoasa where I had already walked to Rediu village, at the border with Heleşteni. From there, we drove to Heleşteni village where the pantomimic mummings were still parading in the streets. I have to admit, embarrassingly, that I had never anticipated what was about to happen. Once we got to Heleşteni with the mayor's car, close to where the mummings used to perform their shows, we were immediately surrounded by them. They knew me and let me get out the car. As a camera man and photographer, I was treated well within their company, especially since they knew that they would get pictures from me at the end of the ritual interval. This meant I was not the one they were looking for. But a young and beautiful girl like Evelina, a student from Iași city, seemed to be a great target for them.

Some mummings ran to the car, opened its doors and prepared the girl's expulsion from the car, making use of their twisted scarves, their manly force and large number. That moment I understood I could no longer prevent them from getting what they wanted, so I decided to record the whole scene that I felt I was responsible and guilty of. In the beginning, mummings tried to take Evelina out of the car, then drove the car about 100 meters away. I saw that Evelina – who, I later learned, even as a child had not been afraid of mummings – managed to defend herself well, pushing and slapping them fiercely, surprisingly quick for the mummings' own reactions. After a few moments of specific harassment and playful fighting, including messing her hair completely, the mummings around her unmasked themselves laughing. As I later found out, most of them were ex-primary school colleagues or anyway acquaintances or friends.

That same day, in the afternoon, when Evelina told her parents what had happened, they were curious to see the recording. They were not too happy to see their car "stolen" and abandoned 100 meters away, as I noticed. But they did not mention anything and just watched. While seeing them watch their daughter being "attacked" and their car drove away by drunken young men, I was left with the feeling they looked as two hard-working householders who watched through the window their garden being destroyed by hail. Just as in the case of a natural calamity, the mummings seemed to be a nature force set free that nobody could oppose and that only left space for contemplation. Experienced householders, my hosts understood that complaining about mummings' deeds or trying to avoid them would only reinforce their coming back.

Moving further in my journey with the mummings in Heleşteni, I had the chance to observe many other events that filled the missing pieces in the overall image of mummings and their relations with the village universe. Another memorable situation I witnessed involved a householder around 30 years old who was fixing a carriage wheel in front of his courtyard's gate. A group of mummings attacked him right away and the man started to fight them. Although the attack and the fight seemed very brutal to me, from the very beginning there was an element that contradicted my impression. For fixing the wheel, the man had a hammer in his hand the moment he was attacked. And, strangely enough, he did not drop the hammer during the fight. Nevertheless, even during the most violent moments of the fight, he did not even show the intention of using the tool against his aggressors. On the contrary, even when attacked from all sides, he would rather move his elbows to protect himself than to

make use of the hammer; to me, it seemed the hammer was rather an obstacle for him than a tool that could be useful for self-defence.

An hour later, I observed a similar situation. A man aged between 40 and 45 was attacked by mummers in front of his courtyard, close to the busiest street in the comună. Four of the mummers left their group and attacked him, hitting him with handbags and scarves. Well, it was just in the middle of this stampede that a car at a high speed was coming from the opposite direction. Despite the blows he was getting, he warned the mummers attacking him about the car approaching from behind. So the whole group went aside, by the fence, and the car passed by at a pretty high speed. All these things enforced my conviction that these confrontations did not involve hatred or rancor. It was rather a playful fight that seemed tough, but was actually more like a game.

But the game had dangerous sides, too. The risk increased because of the large alcohol consumption. The village bars were already open at 7 a.m., and mummers preferred them for resting in front of a glass of wine or beer. Besides all the short breaks mummers took in the pubs for warming up a little, many bottles were carried around, and then passed on from one to another while the parade advanced in the village. The moments mummers stopped cars in the streets were particularly dangerous. More than once, I saw mummers stopping cars, with the drivers forced to wait for about ten minutes until the attackers got bored and let them go. Sometimes, these games turned more aggressive, meant to threaten especially the drivers coming from somewhere else, unaware of what was going on. A woman from a neighboring town came to visit some friends in Heleşteni, and told me how her car had been blocked on the side of the road by some “giant masked men” that balanced the car from all sides. “I was so scared I thought I’d have a heart attack. I would have given them anything just to leave me alone. But I had no money with me because I was coming from the hairdresser. But I believe I would have given them even 100 lei, had I had that money with me.” (45 years old woman, guest of my host, Oboroceni village, January 2, 2015, field notes).

Indeed, the frontier between play and danger became very fragile during the ritual. The driver of a bakery’s car from the neighborhood declared that, on December the 31<sup>st</sup>, the company he was working for decided not to deliver products to the villages where mummers were performing. The reason was that, some years before, one of the company’s cars had been stopped on the street for about 15 minutes, and meanwhile its back door had opened. Thus the driver lost about 100 loaves of bread until he realized what had happened. Probably

this kind of events led to the creation of a superstition deeply rooted among locals. It says that if one died with the mask on, he would go straight to hell without any judgment. As an anthropologist, I recognized right away the functionalist dimension of this belief, and especially its tight bond with all the episodes I had witnessed or heard involving mummers.

The large group of mummers wanders on the streets of the *comună* from 5:00 a.m. until around 11:30 a.m. After midday, mummers split because some of them, such as those aged between 18 and 21, often join the *Dance of the Goat*, too. Many of the morning mummers also join the meeting at 2:00 p.m. in front of the mayor's office. There, some of them join the *Goat teams*, and sometimes even the *comoraș* of the *Goat team* is brought by a group of mummers on wooden poles carried on their shoulders, until in front of the *comună* hall. In the *comună* hall's park, mummers go on harassing passers-by, unlike the more temperate *Deer* or *Goat teams*. This time, the category most likely to be harassed was that of the young girls. They were chased in the park and, if caught, pushed to the ground and sometimes hit with snow. The girls were frequently scared by the rough noises mummers uttered. But they often managed to convince mummers to take pictures together or even dance with some of the mummers to the pipe and drum music the *Goat teams* were playing.

Another attraction in this part of the public ceremony in front of the town hall is the presentation of the pantomimic sketches of the mummers' groups. Various characters such as politicians in power, television stars, football players or singers are embodied as caricatures, ironized by means of masks, costumes and pantomimic sketches performed by mummers. Throughout this parade, the irony and humour – sometimes black humour – are easily noticed. In 2011, for example, a couple of mummers were dressed up as follows: one in the orange garments of the government party, wearing a mask representing a death demon; the other one in policeman garments with a toy-gun in hand. The inscription on the garments said: "I've peppered you!!!" This was an allusion to the country's president after winning the elections. The president had said that addressing the opposition but, subsequently, after the Romanian economic crisis began in 2008, his statement was undertaken by different opposition newspapers, showing that, by means of austerity measures, the ones governing have peppered the Romanian people. Or, this is exactly what the mummers group, by their behavior and clothes, wanted to express: with its anti-crisis measures, the government had peppered the Romanian people.

Another mummer also wore clothes typical to the electing campaign of the Democratic Party, thus expressing political membership. His mask represented a clown's face, mouth and tongue. But the mouth was full of blood, as if the clown had just suck someone's blood. In all of these cases, meanings and interpretations are multiple, but the critique of government is very obvious. I also saw mummers which had their clothes printed with the name of a character in the government panoply - for example the name of the prime minister or of the president - while their mask represented a werewolf or Frankenstein, probably trying to unveil the real essence of these two characters. In other cases, criticism towards the political power was subtler. For example, a mummer dressed up as a bride, but wore a pillow under his dress, over the belly, suggesting pregnancy. At the same time, the character simulated sickness. Being asked if (s)he wanted to go outside – informally, that refers to going to the toilet -, (s)he would answer: “Yes, yes, I really want outside, I really want to go outside (*only to add after a long break*)... but outside the country!” In this case, the critique was also subtle, suggesting that life in Romania is so unbearable that one has to leave the country to live abroad.

After this public performance that usually takes about two hours, the large group of mummers splits and, from this moment on, they are supposed to walk around the village in groups of 5-8 members, each visiting villagers separately. This sequence in the ritual shall be private from now on, with all representations taking part in the householders' houses and courtyards. The division of the large group of mummers is based on two pragmatic criteria: first, a family could not welcome more than 8-10 people simultaneously in their house; second, mummers' groups do not go caroling to each house, but only to the places they prefer. So, every group of mummers usually visits their own relatives, friends and neighbors, without stopping in every house that could actually welcome them, as the *Goat* and *Deer teams* do.

### **3. House-visit, Speech Disguise and Guessing-game**

Whereas the *Goat* or *Deer team* goes immediately to the households in the village to carol village householders, mummers act differently. *Pantomimic mummers* generally start their visits in the village only when evening comes and, especially, when night falls. Therefore, their image is associated to tenebrousness and night darkness. The symbolic parallel between mummers' behavior and the dark of the night is more than obvious.

Another visible distinction between *Pantomimic Mummings'* teams and those of the *Goat* and the *Deer* is the duration of each visit. *Deer* and *Goat* teams are very quick when visiting and do not spend more than 6-10 minutes at each house, but pantomimic mummings stay in a household at least half an hour, sometimes even one hour. Of all the teams caroling in the Heleşteni comună during winter holidays, mummings are the only ones that do not take any money from people. They are happy with the householders' hospitality and generosity in terms of food, sweets and drinks. When it comes to *Deer* and *Goat* rituals, eating and drinking is exactly the stage that can be absent. These teams are rather interested in getting money than in spending too much time with the villagers – and especially in houses where there are no young girls and thus flirting and courting are not possible. Meanwhile, since *Pantomimic Mummings* do not take any money, it becomes clear that their motivation is different and has to do more with the mutual relations in the village than with the immediate financial benefit. Therefore, during one of my discussions with my hosts and their friends about “the most traditional ritual of all those performed for the New Year”, many argued that is the *Pantomimic Mummings* precisely because they do not pay the visit for money, and their relationship is an exchange of goods. Mummings wish the householders wealth and abundance; meanwhile, householders offer food and drinks back.

Generally, the script depicting the mummings' behavior in the household follows an already established pattern, usually with five or six stages. In an amazing coincidence, these stages of the mummings' actions in all the three villages of Heleşteni comună (Oboroceni, Hărmăneasa and Heleşteni) resembles perfectly what the American folklorist Herbert Halpert called *informal visits* or *house-visist* upon describing the mummings' actions in the Canadian island of Newfoundland.

Below I present the behavioral pattern described by Halpert and I indicate only the slight differences between the actions of the mummings in Newfoundland and those of the mummings in Heleşteni.

The salient features of the house-visit are as follows:

- a) The visitors are an informal group of varying composition [This feature coincides completely with the mummings in Heleşteni who, unlike the *Deer* and *Goat* ritual, also include women and older people, sometimes even older than 50 n.a.].
- b) Members of the group attempt complete disguise. This involves (1) disguise of face and body with varying degrees of elaboration, and with sex-reversal (the

man-woman figures) as a frequent pattern; (2) disguise of gestures and body movement; (3) disguise of voice, especially, though not invariably, the use of ingressive speech [All these elements are present in the case of the Heleşteni mummers, with just few outfit differences. While in Newfoundland the dominating mask is that of a fisherman, in Heleşteni we have the so-called beautiful mummers, with multicoloured costumes and masks decorated with a lot of beads. People disguised in the opposite sex are just as frequent as in Newfoundland n.a.].

- b1) [One or more people in the mummers' group utter a *urătură*<sup>19</sup> before the householder opens the door. This stage only appears in the case of the Heleşteni mummers and I have not found it mentioned in any of the studies on the Newfoundland mummers].
- c) The behavior of the disguised visitors tends to be uninhibited and the reverse of normal. On request, however, they may entertain by singing, playing musical instruments, and dancing [The uninhibited behavior of the mummers in Heleşteni is just as notorious as that of their Newfoundland homologues, and it consists especially of hitting the household's master – the man – with handbags, twisted scarves and plastic cables, and hugging by force, fondling and harassing women and girls. The difference between them and the Newfoundland mummers is that in Heleşteni mummers do not have musical instruments. I have only once seen an accordion, but this is a rare occurrence among mummers in the locality n.a.].
- d) The hosts attempt to penetrate the disguises by a form of guessing-game, sometimes accompanied by roughness; unmasking by the visitors usually, though not invariably, follows successful identification [This stage is identical to the one I saw at the Heleşteni mummers. The act of pushing the hosts around by hitting, poking and brutally hugging, with a background of rough sounds and short statements produced by the mummers, and with short pantomimes performed simultaneously, made me call these teams *Pantomimic Mummers* n.a.].

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<sup>19</sup> *Urătura* (pl. *urături*) is a text structured as a poem or as a song that the carolers recite when they visit a household belonging to their village community. In peasant communities, the text included messages about that particular family and household benefitting from wealth of the harvest and a rich agricultural year. Along with the transition of agricultural societies to a different mode of production – such as the industrial one – the texts of the *urături* acquired carnivalesque traits and were rather meant to entertain and to make fun than to transmit a magical message about the fertility of the crops.

- e) The unmasked figures return to their normal social roles and are usually offered, and accept, food and drink. Unlike the pattern of many of the English *collectors*<sup>20</sup>, however, no part of this offering is taken away [This stage also coincides perfectly with the behavior mummers adopt in the end in the households they visit in Heleşteni] (Halpert 1969:37-38).

The poignant thing is that, after describing the typology, the American folklorist moves on to generalizing and stating the Newfoundland mummers' singularity: "It might, theoretically, be posited that the house-visit is a peculiarly Newfoundland development, originating perhaps in special local conditions and spreading internally through the movement of population or through contact in the seal hunt, the Labrador fishery, or logging" (Halpert 1969:38).

Nevertheless, his own experience and his knowledgeable folklorist intuition save him in the last moment from a hasty generalization; therefore, he adds: "But against such an assumption is the fact that many parts of the Island, and Labrador, were settled at different times and by different groups who often came directly from Great Britain and Ireland... An origin in the British Isles is therefore to be assumed despite the lack of detailed reports from England itself" (Halpert 1969:38). In Chapter five, I will detail my disagreement with Halpert's originist hypothesis.

To continue, I describe briefly in a few lines an element of the house-visit that the Heleşteni mummers do and that distinguishes them from their homologues in Newfoundland. This element is the mummers' *urătură* (a carol in verses). Although the *urătură* has been underlined by many of my interviewees as important during the house-visit in the village, my field research showed me that less than half of the mummers' teams still perform nowadays this part of the ritual. The analysis of the *urături* I collected in Heleşteni *comună* made me discover extremely precious information about the aim of the mummers' house-visit. In the meantime, the comparison between *urături* collected from persons with considerable age differences proved extremely useful in understanding the transformation of the village community during a few decades filled with economic, political and social challenges.

One of the *urături* I have collected was recited to me by Ion Scripcaru, a 79 years old living in Heleşteni. His *urătură* comprised no less than 162 verses (Appendix E). Just as in the *Deer* disenchantment, some of these lyrics include sometimes absurd or hardly

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<sup>20</sup> "Collectors is the term conventionally used by English folklorists to refer to the figures (usually performers) who on various calendar occasions collect food or coins in return for their visit and occasional performances. Not all *collectors* wear disguises" (Halpert 1969:38).



understandable ideas and fragments. But, despite all this, the analysis of the *urătură* revealed three main ideas. The most important idea, underlined from the very first lines, is that the householders for whom the *urătură* had been made had an impressive year from the point of view of agriculture, with a fabulous crop, so rich that the mill itself – personified as a live being in the lyrics – was frightened by the huge quantity of wheat to be ground. The other two ideas speak about the double aim of the mummers' visit: meeting the householders' daughters (as well as other young girls in the village), and receiving some of the family's wealth, such as pork and as much beverage as possible.

A more recent *urătură*, collected from a younger local of Heleşteni is much shorter than the one collected from elder generations, and it comprises only 96 verses (Appendix F). Unlike the older *urătură*, this one opened with a pretty obvious suggestion that mummers would like to receive as much money as possible in exchange for the visit and the *urătură* (despite the fact that actually mummers never ask or receive money from the householder). Following the same line, the second idea of the *urătură* is defined. It has to do with identifying the changes produced by modernity in the village world: building flamboyant houses with all the utilities, just as in the city. The next idea seems new because it deals with men's marriage (*însurătoare*), a thorny issue in peasant communities, modern ones included, since it mentions the necessary setting up of a household and redistributing some resources from other two previous households. That is why youngsters have to prove they deserve the mission, they are endowed with great qualities – first of all, as skilled workers; then, as good householders. Contrary to these requirements, the verses of the *urătură* tell the story of a girl who knows nothing about work within a peasant household, and a man who was a heavy drinker. Under these circumstances, with the woman's pathological laziness and the man's impulsiveness, the result is a troubled family where domestic violence is constant in daily life.

Other more recent *urături*, collected from younger generations, also revolve around marriage, village transformations in the capitalist world, political corruption and the lack of money that humble people – peasants – deal with.

All the data contained by ancient and modern *urături* speaks about the transformations of the rural community, but also reveal a simple fact: setting up a new household in the rural world still is one of the thorniest problems that peasant communities face even nowadays. According to the information resulting from my discussions with the comună inhabitants, one

of the main objectives of the mummers' house-visit is facilitating the contact between young men and young women. Entertainment, mutual obligations inside the larger family, celebrating St. Vasile's Day<sup>21</sup> in the meantime (including the persons named Vasile or Vasilica) were also mentioned among the objectives of the house-visit performed by the *Pantomimic Mummers* in Heleşteni comună.

According to the pre-established ritual, the mummers' house-visits start on the late evening of December the 31<sup>st</sup>, and last until 5 a.m. the next morning. The same program is respected for January the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Generally, there is a clear distinction between the mummers' public and private manifestations. This separation is defined by a series of clear-cut time sequences, but especially by the place where a particular ritual sequence occurs: either on the public space of the communal streets or in the private realm of a village household.

On January the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the last public appearance of the mummers takes place within a festive gathering similar to the one happening in front of the *comună* hall on December the 31<sup>st</sup>. This meeting is in Oboroceni village, at the intersection of the 208G county road and the 99 communal road coming from Hărmăneasa village. This is the spot where the routes coming from all the four villages of Heleşteni converge, being a real crossroad. Only a few tens of meters away, a bar was opened, and this event made the area more appealing to mummers. From 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., the large mummers' group reaches the place in order to present their sketches.

Just as in front of the town hall, mummers mock various aspects of society, from greed and vanity to TV addiction, excessive bashfulness, etc. Stock characters in such contexts – like the prostitute, the transvestite – are present, next to monstrous figures like demons, Frankenstein, and hangmen. Characters popular in national or international politics are also present. In the photos I had collected from villagers or taken by me throughout the years, I have managed to identify mummers impersonating dictators such as Saddam Hussein and Ceauşescu, terrorists like Osama bin Laden, but also important figures of the December 1989 Revolution like László Tőkés. This time, mummers wearing beautiful masks decorated with beads are present, too. Most often, they perform sketches in groups of two or three, or even on their own. For instance, I once saw two mummers dragging a TV wherever they

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<sup>21</sup> Sf. Vasile – Saint in the Christian Orthodox calendar, whose day is celebrated on January the 1st. Both ancient and old *urături* linked the mummers' house-visit and the celebration of St. Vasile's Day.

went, and showing to the locals watching that it was impossible to separate from the device. Another year, I even saw a mummer performing a fragment of a folk tale. The character was playing *Păcală* and carried a door on his back. *Păcală* is a popular character of Romanian folklore and it is mentioned in the stories of Ion Creangă, the well-known writer born in Moldova. This particular sequence – with *Păcală* carrying the door – had been included in a screen adaptation of 1974, directed by Geo Saizescu. The comedy's success went well beyond the 1970s, and it led to the movie being broadcasted more times by national television channels even in recent years.

Sometimes, this meeting also includes larger sketches. The most complex sketch I observed took place on January the 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014. It was complex because it “staged” and, in fact, satirized an entire funeral. But the priest was an ugly and ulcerous demon, stepping in front of the cortege, rhythmically moving his censer. He was accompanied by a cantor wearing a skull mask on his head – a popular death depiction – strongly contrasting with his bright red hat. The cross bearer came after, wearing a demon mask, too, and a white petticoat. The cross was made out of two twisted branches and the icon usually fixed in its middle had been replaced by a photo of a couple engaged in an intercourse. Behind came wailing old women (*bocitoare*) wearing black skirts, but they were actually men in disguise, their face covered with demon masks, too. The funeral cortege produced an unbearable noise, mimicking the wailing and crying of the dead man's relatives. Inside the coffin, improvised out of fir planks, the dead lied dressed in his best suit. But, according to the mask on his head, it was Dracula himself. On the “Eternal remembrance” slogan written on the coffin, pornographic photos had been stuck. The “funerary” cortege moved until reaching a crossroad where they met other masked persons, next to a mainly unmasked group of villager-viewers. There, the funerary cortege started dancing lively and, at this point, according to his own nature, Dracula went out of the coffin and became the most important dancer, while villagers took photos with him. This structure somehow reminds us of classic Ion Creangă's short story *Ivan Turbincă*, a story begotten on Moldavian land, too. In this satire about death and its consequences, Creangă invents Ivan, a character who takes advantage of the power God had given him, mocks Death – making it eat nothing but trees – and, in the end, locks Death inside the coffin by inverting their roles (Creangă 2010).

Attacks on the villagers watching the performance happen here, too. Mummers attack especially unmasked youngsters, either male or female. In the meantime, taking advantage of the geostrategic location – a road with many cars passing by – mummers stop cars in the

street and bother the drivers, showing them obscene signs through the windows and coming with their grinning masks closer to the car's windows. All these actions are even more intense in case young girls are inside the car, and mummers welcome them with throaty sounds meant to scare them. Some mummers even ask for money from the drivers and, in some cases, they are given 1-2 lei (50 cents). However, the play's main purpose is not the money, but the desire to have fun by mocking certain aspects of the global and national society, as well as of the local village community.

Thus we observe that the masquerade in Oboroceni ends the proper cycle of the mummers' public performances in the comună of Heleşteni. The *Goat* and *Deer teams* stop caroling at the villagers' houses after January 1<sup>st</sup>. The only teams that still walk around the villages of the comună that evening are the smaller *Pantomimic Mummers'* groups in their private visits at various householders. But they are also going to end their wander around 3 or 4 a.m. on January, the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

#### **4. Pantomimic Mummers: Hypotheses, Theories and Interpretations**

Obviously, the most striking aspect of the mummers' actions in Heleşteni is physical violence. It created a very complex entanglement of situations and cultural expressions whose analysis is sometimes difficult to cope with. Physical violence generally afflicts the bodies, the psychics and the socio-cultural order, Rubben and Suarez tell us in an article dealing with the topic of violence (Robben and Suarez-Orozco 2000). When I had the opportunity to analyze closely the traces mummers' violence leaves on individuals and on their culture, I saw the embodiment of the principle quoted above. More than once, bringing the mummers' wandering in the comună to discussion, my interviewees showed me bruises on their arms and legs, all caused during the confrontation with the mummers. One of the images that stayed in my mind was that of a young woman called Roxana who showed me about three bruises the size of a chicken egg on both her arms. Other people I talked to showed me serious signs on their thighs and back. All these were still present in the people's psyche even years after. A teenager recalled how, a few years before, when caroling with a team of *Small Horses (Căiuți)*, he and all his team colleagues had been chased by a group of drunken mummers, and managed to save themselves due to an older local who took all the kids inside his house. Other locals told me stories that had happened years before, when drunk mummers pushed around people in the village so hard that they broke the victims' arms and ribs. The

stories must have had a traumatic effect on the interviewees' psyche, since even 20 years later, they could still give detailed accounts about those events.

Nevertheless, the most visible effect these acts of violence had on the socio-cultural order was noticeable when I heard people's talks during the holidays, around a family table abundantly covered with food, where relatives, friends and neighbors had gathered. Having the chance to join these discussions a few times, I always tried to check one of my initial hypotheses: the mummars' increased violence could have been caused by the economic and political transformations of the capitalist society, the cutting economic competition and perhaps even the political tensions in the country and in the region following the fall of Communism. My favourite questions were seeking information for a comparison between the intensity of mummars' violent acts now and in the past (during communist times or even before). In trying this, I got the most ambiguous and confusing data, and in the end I had no clue on the rise of violence intensity in postsocialist times. Not even coding the interviews into categories with the use of Nvivo Pro program could shed any light on this issue.

Another relevant example for the ambiguous state of my initial hypotheses was provided during an interview taken on January the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015, inside the house of one of my most important collaborators in Oboroceni. Mitică and Roxana, a young couple aged around thirty started complaining about mummars' violence and the bruises they got during the holidays. The next moment, Mitică decreed, and Roxana supported his statement, that these very brutal acts of violence started only in recent years. But, in order to confirm his idea, I asked his brother's opinion, since that one was eight years older. The brother, who had remained silent until that moment, contradicted his sibling passionately, stating that when he had been younger, violence was even fiercer.

I recorded the same polemical discussion on January the 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015 in my hosts's house in Oboroceni. This time, eight people sat around the table and each tried to express his or her opinion on the topic. Yet, the discussions did not seem to bring any decisive argument in favor of any of the hypotheses regarding the increase of violence in recent years. However, all of a sudden, the mayor himself brought about a case study and a remark that everybody agreed with. "This trend of tough violence was brought to us by Lică Bordea, our neighbor here, down the valley." "Yeah, and ever since then he does not dare to go outside his house during holidays because he's afraid of mummars, for all this has turned against him", a guest of the mayor confirmed. "Yeah, that's true!", agreed Mrs. Doina, too.

The remark made during the discussion switch the focus of my attention not only on the mummerners' group in general, but also on certain individuals, their behavior and gestures. With this aim in mind, I started analyzing more conscientiously the videos I had taken since the beginning of my research, and, identifying the mummerners with the help of my friend Florin, I discovered that tougher acts of violence were committed by impulsive people in real life too, who were inclined to find brutal solutions even to daily life issues. The same people were the ones wearing the most extravagant clothes, with phalluses attached and sometimes with prostitutes' or transvestites' daring outfits. The entire carnivalesque atmosphere of the closing year looked like an embodiment of Milan Kundera's maxim in his *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "life among his kind is nothing other than a battle to seize the ear [and the eyes I would add] of others" (Kundera 1999).

But not all mummerners used the same methods to mesmerize the eyes and ears of the others. While some used mostly violence and sexual representations, many others used their intelligence to create humorous sketches that brought fun and cheerfulness on people's faces. In fact, these were the acts the householders appreciated most, and the authors were always welcomed with smiles and satisfaction. Despite this, it seems nobody actually tried to prevent brutal acts like the ones already described; as a result, some of the community members used the extra freedom the community granted them during holidays only to express their moral and psychological traits, marked by impulsiveness and basic instincts that suggested them brutal solutions to any potential conflict.

The violence accompanying all these forms and manifestations of the mummerners' plays has almost always been doubled by sexuality. During my field research, from 2009 to 2017, I have had the chance to observe many expressions of sexuality in the pantomimic mummerners' games. Either involving the image of the transvestite, the homosexual or the prostitute, the phalluses hidden underneath the clothes, porn magazines pages stuck ostentatiously on clothes, various other artifacts (such as clubs, crosses) or simple slogans with sexual content usually painted on garments, these representations were ever-present in the mummerners' group on December the 31<sup>st</sup> – January the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The immediate tendency is to link these representations to concepts such as masculinity, homoeroticism or homophobia, and to parallel them to postsocialist transformations like unemployment, labor migration and the emancipation following the fall of Communism (see for example Creed 2011:70-104). But, despite this strong temptation, the careful observation of mummerners and of the context of

their disguise, and especially the comparative study of more sources relating to mummers, convinced me that the theme of sexual transgression shows continuity with past ritual practice not a break from it.

I reached this conclusion especially after examining ancient sources about mummers. Du Cange, for instance, in his *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, when analyzing medieval sources, mentions transvestites during some peasant holidays centuries ago: “Pirminius in Excerptis de sacris Scripturis: Cervulos et vehiculas (leg. vetulas, aut veticulas<sup>22</sup>) in quadragesima vel aliud tempus nolite ambulare. Viri vestes femineas, feminae vestes viriles in ipsis Kalendis, vel in alia lusa<sup>23</sup> quamplurima nolite vestire.<sup>24</sup>”

In this case, not even the modern concepts of transsexual and transvestite, already charged by modern society with very different connotations, would prove useful regarding the actual events in these rural societies that possess a rich history of the carnivalesque and the transvestite. Bakhtin observed all these and developed one of the most complex theories regarding the apparently bizarre behavior of peasants during various holidays, and especially during winter carnivalesque gatherings. He noticed that sexuality, many times accompanied by obscenity, mocking and deriding are constituent parts of the carnivalesque humor that, in turn, is an integral part of folk humor (Bakhtin 1984).

I reached similar conclusions when I analyzed the context of the mummers' dressing. While some of them care a lot about their garments and masks, designing them passionately long before, others decide to join the mummers' parades only one or two days (sometimes even a few hours) before the event begins. Usually they are the ones adopting transvestite or prostitute's outfits, since its creation would be much more accessible and easier. In 2012, I accepted a group of friends' invitation to such an event in Heleşteni, and I had taken the decision just a few hours prior to the ritual. Our group had five men and three young women. While girls wore beautiful costumes and masks decorated with beads, three of the young men dressed as transvestites, putting on only some old-fashioned female garments and nylons found among the old clothes of their opposite-sex relatives. Without any such clothes, I took an old blanket I had found abandoned among my host's old stuff, covered myself with it, and added a Halloween mask I had brought from the US. This type of disguise, as well as cross-

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<sup>22</sup> Noun not to be found in dictionaries.

<sup>23</sup> Noun *lusa* < vb. *ludo*, -*ěre* (?)

<sup>24</sup> “Do not wear/ walk with the Deers [Cervulos] and with carriages [vehiculas] (to be read = old women) in the fourteenth day or on any other. Man should not wear women's clothes, nor should women wear men's clothes during the calends of January or during many other plays.”

dressing that the other men in our group adopted, seemed extremely natural in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the winter holidays.

I reached this conclusion not only by analyzing the way the young men in my group behaved, but also by paying attention to the photos taken during Communism or even before, when figures such as the transvestite, the prostitute and the homosexual were almost always there inside the mummers' groups. Therefore, the most convincing conclusion I reached was that sexual representations in end of year carnivalesque expressions in Heleşteni embodied a challenge to the rigid and less tolerant norms of a peasant community that did not allow many digressions throughout the year.

Despite this preliminary conclusion, I could not help thinking about the mummers' physical violence and also about the visual violence staged by means of the explicit sexual representations: what was the meaning in hurting or offending somebody who was about to become your host and to welcome you to their home? My assumption was that, apart from the negative side involved by all the physical and visual violence, there had to be something positive in all this. Otherwise, the community would have eliminated these acts during the carnivalesque manifestations when a lot of freedom was allowed, but not all types of acts were acceptable.

After an extensive and immersive observation, and the analysis of my entire activity as anthropologist in rural areas, one of the things I discovered was that the transition between years was marked by a set of rituals that are meant to create a series of landmarks on the individual and collective memory map. Thus, for a small and relatively isolated community, the mummers' ritual offered the chance to mark dates in the calendar that would have otherwise have passed unnoticed, just as any other day, with the monotony of the agricultural labor rhythms, dictated by seasons and their specific activities. Mummers opened a window to a world that was normally censured by the strict rules of peasant society in day to day life. Because of this particular reason, mummers represented a sort of anchor for the ontological security (Giddens 1991) of individuals and a good remedy for fighting existential anxiety (Idem 1991) in an agricultural society where the events in the individual's social life followed a sometimes dreary regularity. Within this picture, one did not need something that would reinforce daily routines, but rather a series of memorable landmarks where routine would melt away together with the depression and the anxieties of a life that is too formal. As Anthony Giddens – the sociologist who coined the term “ontological security” – said: “In



premodern contexts, tradition has a key role in articulating action and ontological frameworks; tradition offers an organizing medium of social life specifically geared to ontological precepts” (Idem 1991:48).

Somehow, just as in fairy tales where monsters and demons often show up, mummers and their world are the foundation of the process preparing the inhabitants of these small societies based on agrarian rhythms for the confrontation with the challenges, tensions and dangers of life. If in the case of mummers, this fact has not yet been theorized, for fairy tales this approaches exist and one of them belongs to Bruno Bettelheim, an author from psychoanalytical school, who thought the world in fairy tales prepared children for life much better than cartoons or modern cinema (Heisig 1977)<sup>25</sup>.

Furthermore, what stands for fairy tales stands just as well for mummers. *Pantomimic Mummers* express simultaneously humans’ ugly face, violence, callousness, brutality, shamelessness, uncontrolled lust, and humans’ peaceful side, their tendency to dialogue, humor, communication, empathy, exchange of ideas and mutualness. All of these elements are present especially in the mummers’ escapades inside the households, during the ritual sequence known as *house-visit*, when they are violent, brutal and shameless, only to become peaceful, communicative and friendly afterwards. Therefore, mummers present both sides of human society – the negative and the positive – and these two are staged during a play that offers the premises for preparing individuals to face real events during the whole year. And, maybe not accidentally, children were always allowed to see the mummers’ house-visits, though sometimes they were utterly terrified by what they saw.

My supposition that mummers are directly connected to the individuals’ ontological security and mental stability was reinforced by an interview I conducted on June the 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012, outside the winter holiday season. The family I visited had three members – the grandparents and a grandson. At first, I had been interested in the grandson’s own experience as seasonal migrant to Italy. Alin was a 20 year old man who, just like many other people of his age, had left his native village and went to try his luck in a country where construction workers are paid better. Unfortunately, health issues made him come back to the village sooner than he had expected. Right after revealing this piece of information, Alin started telling me about his work in the village, in agriculture, making his grandparents interrupt and

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<sup>25</sup> I owe this quote to my friend and collaborator, Bogdan Neagota, who has done a more in-depth and yet unfinished research on the relationship between the individual’s exposure to fairy tales and his/her subsequent ability to adapt to certain challenging situations in the adult life.

reorient the discussion towards family and family issues. Thus I found out that the son of the two elders had passed away 18 years ago, on December 1994, killed by a sudden severe illness right before winter holidays. Shortly after, given the difficult financial situation, Alin's mother preferred to leave her four year old son in the grandparents' care. In 2009, she emigrated to Italy and settled there.

After this sad story, the grandparents and their grandson talked to me about the pain and their immense *dor*<sup>26</sup> after the untimely death of their son. In this context, they told me about their son's passion for the mummers' rituals and for designing the masks. Thus I was able to find out that, only two weeks before his death, Alin's father managed to finish his last mask – the one he would no longer be able to wear that year. After this startling disclosure, their faces lit up instantly and, as in front of a miracle, they took a carefully packed mask out of a plastic bag, where it had been preserved in a corner of the room. „This mask is what reminds me best of my father”, Alin stated. Then he put the mask on the bed next to him and left it there until the end of our talk. Before leaving this family's house, I offered to take some photos of them. That moment, Alin naturally embraced the mask his father had made, as if it were a symbolic representation of his untimely gone father. This way, my photo had brought all the family members together, next to the precious mask.

I collected a similar story from Mihăiță, a young migrant. He described to me passionately his bitter experience as seasonal worker in constructions, in a town close to Craiova, in southern Romania. For more than three months, he had been working there to build a road. Workers were accommodated in horrible conditions, in unhealthy barracks, being paid back only two meals each day, with the money promised to be given “the following month”. After three months of hard work, Mihăiță knew that the payment promise was just a story meant to deceive the workers as long as possible. So, despite all the effort, he decided to go back home to Heleşteni penniless. “While traveling to Iași by train, all I had in mind were images of mummers and holidays in the village”, Mihăiță confessed to me. “But do you enjoy walking with mummers?”, I asked him. “Oh, I'm crazy about them!”, he replied. If during the entire interview I could notice the grimace on his face, according to the insults he threw at his “bosses who took advantage of the workers”, upon hearing my question his face was illuminated suddenly and a large smile expressed his deep joy, as well as his profound relation with the ritual.

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<sup>26</sup> *Dor* – specific concept in Romanian language evoking at the same time feelings of nostalgia, melancholy, profound wish towards something or someone far from you, doubled by a sense of loss.

In both cases presented above, mummers offered my interviewees a sense of continuity and stability, inside an increasingly stressful postsocialist universe where greed, deceit, betrayal and untimely death were more and more frequent.

I found another example of ontological security when trying to answer a question that apparently had nothing to do with it. I have often asked myself what meaning could there be in aggressing and harassing, sometimes quite brutally, family members that would later offer you their hospitality, inviting you at their table, offering you food, drinks and their shelter's warmth. Solving this problem seemed quite impossible for many subjects I questioned and even for some of the elders joining the custom. But, the moment I thought this dilemma has no solution, Florin gave me an answer that puzzled me completely:

When you enter a household and make a wish for them, you are doing them a service. They stay indoors where it is warm, while you are outside in the cold and recite your wish of wealth and prosperity for the coming year. Despite all this, the householder has no right to think he is your superior. The reason is that *urătorii/carolers* and the householders are equal, even if it's the mummers that walk in the cold weather to visit the household. In the case of the *Goat* and *Deer* customs, young people visit the household and they are given money. These youngsters are unmarried, do not have any family or household yet, so they have a lower status within the village. But the mummer is a householder himself. Therefore, when you enter the house and aggress the head of the family, the purpose is to make him realize he is not above you (Florin Chiperi, 26 years old, Heleşteni village, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014, Skype discussion).

Later on, after reading more carefully and with this idea in mind the book dedicated by Halpert and Story to the mummers in Newfoundland, I found a theory that proved revealing in this respect (Szwed 1969). Following the path of Max Gluckman and Edward Norbeck who studied rituals of rebellion in Africa, Szwed scans the mummers' customs in a small village located in the agricultural area of western Newfoundland. In this locality, based until not too long ago on subsistence agriculture and cod fishing, villagers relate to one another by means of a symmetrical dyadic contact that involves direct contact and mutuality. This system takes the form of mutual visits that include "sharing meals and drinks with those people whom they are aligned to", within a social universe dominated by "a wariness [that] pervades all relationship and ensures a rigid etiquette between persons of all ages" (Idem 1969:107).

In such a world dominated by rigid norms, mummers' plays proves to work as a valve that allows the release of tensions and possible conflicts between community members where the tendency to be high and mighty is ridiculed by satire, gossip and even by friendship break up. Mummers' ritual engenders relations between certain community members who do not communicate too much throughout the year, but who belong to the same community. Thus, "[t]he close emotional and economic interdependence of the family in the village both provides for greater expression of hostilities and reduces them by stressing common interest (Idem 1969:115)" and "the deviant events themselves mark the importance of the occasion: the direct gratification of forbidden hostilities through ritual means and the subsequent recreation and renewal of the social order (Idem 1969:117)."

Analyzing Szwed's article about the small village society of Ross, I could notice right away what this place had in common with the small villages of Heleşteni comună. Before 1945, when Communism came to power in Romania, all the community members used to be involved, next to their entire family, in the agricultural work revolving around the land plots they owned; in their own turn, these plots were cultivated with the collective effort of the family members and sometimes with the help of other community members. Only during communist times, from 1945 to 1989, new social classes – such as that of the peasant commuter-worker – started to be recognizable. It was only during the last two and a half decades, together with the development of the market economy and labor migration to western countries, that a series of more profound inequities were traceable in the social universe of these communities. But even inside this social universe, the mummers' ritual remains among villagers just as successful as before.

Of all the winter ritual extant in the comună, the *Pantomimic Mummers'* ritual is the least endangered by extinction, despite the lack of any safeguarding initiatives and the fact that mummers' house-visits are not paid by the host. It is highly probable that, in the postsocialist universe of the transition – one marked by incertitude, social tensions and increasingly large inequities – pantomimic mummers still offer the illusion of a social order based on equality relationships due to a symmetrical dyadic contact. With the concept of ontological security in mind, one could express the hypothesis that, despite their aggressiveness, the Heleşteni mummers offer an oasis of firmness and certitude in a world where traditional norms and values enter an increasingly strong and quick process of disintegration. They manage to accomplish this through irony, bantering and aggressiveness, creating a temporary universe that seems to contradict all the social norms in the community,

but actually end up restoring them; they thus demonstrate that these are above the transient events of society that the local village community find itself in at a given moment.

As Edward Norbeck observed:

Expressions of hostility in ritual form, firmly regulated, are of course congruous with a social life that is otherwise highly organized socially and politically. Where other safety valves are inadequate, ritual expressions of hostility seem most expectable in societies that exercise firm control over the behavior of their members through formal social units and highly formalized institutions (Norbeck 1963:1274).

## **F. Conclusions**

In his introduction to *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland*, Herbert Halpert and G.M.Story made the following observation: “[I]n many ways we know less about the small fishing settlements of Newfoundland than about portions of East and West Africa, which have for many years been subjected to intensive sociological and anthropological study” (Halpert and Story 1969:4). Almost five decades after this statement was expressed, we could say the same thing about the Romanian mummers whose complex rituals have been ignored for decades by Western anthropology, and little studied by local Folkloristics. In addition, the studies that would try to understand the social life of peasants, the economy and history of their community through the lenses represented by mummers’ plays are totally absent.

With this chapter, I tried to fill this anthropological gap and, in the meantime, to research the mummers’ universe in relation with its most passionate performers – the peasants. I conceived my study on mummers relating it to the new transformations of peasant society under the influence of modernization and industrialization and afterwards under the influence of market economy and global capitalism. Paradoxically, “[o]ver the past two decades, peasants have been slipping from the political and academic gaze” (Bryceson 2000b), despite that an incredible opportunity has just shown up now – the study of the disintegration of this peasant mode of production (Berdichewsky 1979), influenced by the modernization of national states and the globalization of world economy. This entire array of changes was well depicted by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who talked about the conditions that contributed to the openness of relatively close peasant communities, leading them “from the closed world to the infinite universe” (Bourdieu 2008:174). That was precisely the opportunity I tried to respond to, realizing a brief history of north-eastern Romanian

mummers, from when they were just community rituals to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when they became part of the globalized world we live in.

Following the unfolding of *Mummers' Plays* in Heleşteni over a few decades, I have tried to capture the tension between the values and principles of the rural world and those of the modern (globalized and globalizing) society. At a first glance, this development might seem insignificant or even meaningless. Yet, it embodies the extinction of a whole way of living, together with the values and principles that used to form the tissue of a fascinating culture. I am talking about a series of micro cultural-ecosystems where all the dramas, tensions, anguishes and joys of human beings usually happened. And mummers belonged to these cultural ecosystems where local rules and traditions mattered more for the individual's life than European history's important events that historians considered crucial for the continent's fate. This is the reason why, as I have shown throughout this chapter, mummers were not only methods of entertainment, but also means of responding to inevitable problems in the local rural community, with the use of ritual and based on the rules of local rural tradition.

Unfortunately, anthropology and folklore studies have almost completely ignored the profound relation between peasants and the historical geography of their own field and of their own locality. Paradoxically, the demonstration of the strong bond between individuals and their sense of place was successfully emphasized by Anthropology for various tribes and so-called primitive populations. Keith H. Basso proves this in the case of the Apache community and speaks about "Apache constructions of place [that] reach deeply into other cultural spheres, including conceptions of wisdom, notions of morality, politeness and tact in forms of spoken discourse, and certain conventional ways of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past (Basso 1996:xv)." Even if these studies are quite rare in Anthropology, a demonstration similar in many aspects to Basso's was done by the historian Graham Robb in the case of the French peasants whose sense of identity was strongly connected to their own settlement and geographic space; this is also the origin of the incredible cultural diversity of rural France, next to the feelings of local patriotism that are identifiable in almost all rural localities:

Local identity consisted, ultimately, not in ethnic origins, but in the fact that a community happened to be where it was rather than somewhere else (Robb 2008:49)... Away from the noisy, carnage-strewn main roads of French history, the

picture is unexpectedly calm. It suggests compromise and tolerance rather than hatred and fear: priests led pilgrimages to Gallo-Roman shrines, parishioners performed pagan rites under the eyes of the village priest (Robb 2008:136).

The truths about Basso's Apache and Robb's French peasants are valid even to a greater extent in the cases of Romanian peasants. For a long time, even right before Communism came to power, peasants had been living in close relationship with the geography of their own place, rather isolated than strongly connected to the important events in national and European history. In these monadic worlds (Leibniz 1714), mumming represented ways of articulating human problems – from entertainment production to matchmaking and love relationships, from irony towards certain aspects of society to the ritual regularization of conflicts and animosities within the community. Once these small rural communities were integrated into the „infinite universe” of the global world, mummery stopped being what they used to be, and their ability to respond to certain problems within the rural community disintegrated, being undertaken by state institutions. The state institutions and organizations have not only taken the roles of the dying mummery, but have also tried to provide premises for safeguarding them in a world where they were increasingly rare. I am going to develop this idea throughout my entire work. But, for the time being I focus on *Ruginoasa comună*, the locality where one of the most mediatized rituals of the postsocialist period in Romania takes place.

## CHAPTER III

### RUGINOASA COMMUNITY AND ITS RITUALS

#### A. Introduction

In this chapter I focus my attention on one of Heleşteni's neighboring localities that, despite the proximity, is different from Heleşteni in many ways. Primarily, the reason for that is its location by the main road and railways in the region. This has intensified the influences of modern society on the locality. Moreover, since 2004, one of the winter rituals in this *comună* - the *Mummers' Battle with Clubs* - has enjoyed special attention from press and television, turning the local ritual into a sensation at national level, and into a topic of heated debate on various blogs and websites.

Unlike such discussions generally based on speculation and assumptions, and sometimes loaded with strong emotional and ideological standpoints, with my analysis I try to offer a different perspective on this ritual. Adopting the same methodology and vision as in the previous chapter, I look at this confrontation from the point of view of locals - those who know best the history of the locality and the role of the confrontation in shaping the relations between the inhabitants of the *comună*. At the same time, I analyze the mummers' confrontation from a wider perspective, that of a whole ritual complex including two other traditions in the series of mummers' plays: *Malanca* and *Târâitul*.

Using the anthropological theories of violence - such as Galtung's *cultural violence*, and Whitehead's view of violence as *cultural performance* - I try to understand the role of this end-of-the-year aggression for the local community, but also the meanings that villagers and even combatants give it. Besides, I observe how the presence of journalists, through their sometimes hindering intrusions and on-the-spot reports, enhanced the violence of the confrontation during the last decade.

Last but not least, just as in the previous chapter, I approach the entire ritual complex comprising the *Mummers' Battle with Clubs*, *Malanca*, and *Târâitul* in Ruginoasa as a prism through which the economic, social and political transformations that have affected the locality for the past several decades could be understood.



## **B. The Battle with Clubs in Ruginoasa**

### **1. Violence and Mass-Media in Ruginoasa Battle with Clubs**

Unlike the *Dance of the Goat* and the *Dance of the Deer* – which have attracted folklorists’ attention since the very 19<sup>th</sup> century and about which we possess even much older evidence – the battle with clubs in Ruginoasa has not been the topic of any scientific study. This state of facts left many questions and blank spaces regarding the unfolding of this rural ritual in relation to political, historical, economic and social changes in the region where Ruginoasa is located. All these gaps in the history of the *Ruginoasa Battle with Clubs* are explainable and will be analyzed in the following pages. In the meantime, the lack of any written records about the ritual caused me, as researcher, major methodological and theoretical difficulties. In this context, the answers to my doubts and dilemmas about the ritual’s development and its causes came as a result of a detailed analytical exercise based almost entirely on field research. This included the scrutiny of the local oral history and the corroboration of the data from numerous interviews and discussions, so that only the ones with the highest degree of internal coherence and narrated by multiple persons could be validated.

Despite the scarcity of the picture we get when putting together all the written information available from previous decades, beginning with 2004 the tradition became the most mediatized on television, internet, radio and YouTube, acquiring the status of the most popular and, in the meantime, the most controversial winter ritual at national scale. Some of the most famous national television channels (such as ProTV, Realitatea TV, Antena 3, TVR1), but also local televisions (like BitTV Pașcani and Iași Tv Life) broadcasted every year, and especially after 2004, news and reports about the mummers’ confrontation in Ruginoasa. Besides all this, on March the 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, a group of fighters from Ruginoasa participated in the pre-selection for the highly popular television show “Românii au talent” (“Romania’s Got Talent”) broadcasted by the national television channel ProTV, where viewers were presented this *Traditional Battle with Clubs*. These were the reasons why the mummers’ confrontation in Dumbrăvița village, Ruginoasa *comună*, became known nationwide, and one of the most sensational topics for every year’s last day. Worth adding that, in Romania, December the 31<sup>st</sup> is the day with a much higher television audience than in any other day of the year.

Many of these stories and pieces of information were published on the web pages of the media that broadcasted materials recorded during and after the battle. Thus, right now there are dozens of internet websites that present details about the battle with clubs ritual in Ruginoasa. All this data is available online for potential readers interested in the topic, easily accessible from multiple sources and in a very short time.

However, unlike other topics largely dealt with on television and newspapers' websites, in this case getting information from all directions might probably to offer us one of the most distorted and incorrect representations of an extremely complex social phenomenon that has a rich past behind. Therefore, I could state without doubt that The Battle of the Mummers in Ruginoasa is probably one of the most erroneously and misinformingly presented subject in the post-December 1989 media. Thus, it had contributed to sensationalizing a local tradition that, until around 2000, had nothing to do with the principles and values of the national arena and mainstream culture.

The construction of the distorted representation of the ritual is based on multiple causes. One of these was the postsocialist media chasing the sensational. During the wild capitalism of the postsocialist period (Harper 2006), sensational news became a well sold commodity where the number of viewers was proportional with the profit. Another case that complicated the understanding and the analysis of the battle was the physical (and sometimes extreme) violence of the participants, many times inflated by the television cameras nearby. They teleported a tradition with local values and functionality to the viewers' homes, most of which were in urban settings that had little things in common with the values and principles of the rural world that created the confrontation. This rural violence was superposed on the idyllic image of village traditions that the nationalist folkloristics of Romantic inspiration had imposed; these two vectors resulted in a disjunctive relation that, in its turn, contributed to the general confusion about the subject. Last but not least, the general confusion was also reinforced by the contradictory statements of the villagers, fragmented and recombined hastily by field reporters who did not have the time, patience and adequate mood to put things in order by means of a deep analysis.

Precisely because of these reasons, I am going to shed light on some of the most common confusions and errors the press has done when referring to the battle of the mummers in Ruginoasa, and I am going to deconstruct them one by one. One of the most amazing and unreasonable ideas that mass media popularized regarded the battle's origins.

Many television and radio channels spread the information that the mummers' traditional battle is a few thousand years old. "From a ritual that dates back to a few millennia ago, the meeting between the villagers uphill (*din Deal/ eng. from the Hill*) who call themselves *Delenii*, and the rival team downhill (*din Vale/ eng. from the Valley*), it has turned into an ugly drubbing" (*Stirileprotv.ro*), ProTV channel once transmitted. It is obvious that the production of such information has to do with the autochtonist thesis begotten by the Romanian folkloristics where rural traditions had millennia of history behind, and thus a proof of the people's continuation on a geographic area (Neagota 2000).

But the case of Ruginoasa goes definitely against the grain when it comes to this thesis. As noticed in one of the previous sections of this chapter, the oldest mentions of Ruginoasa and its neighboring comună – such as Strunga – do not go further than 1400, when these settlements were simple hamlets inhabited by a few dozens individuals. More, as underlined in the following lines, the confrontation of two rival groups of mummers turned into a battle with clubs only in the late 1970s, about three decades ago.

Another erroneous information the press transmitted was that the ritual of the *Traditional Mummers' Battle* in Ruginoasa is called *Malanca*. "The tradition is known under the folk name *Malanca*, ethnographic and folkloric data on the topic show", one could read on the website of the newspaper *Bună Ziua Iași* ([www.bzi.ro](http://www.bzi.ro)). On *Viața Liberă's* website – another journal – the information is added complementary data, just as far from the truth as the previous one, but worth mentioning now in the analysis. "The custom of caroling with masks and whips is known by locals as *Malanca* and, according to tradition, the winners celebrate the victory by hitting the ground with their clubs ([www.viata-libera.ro](http://www.viata-libera.ro))". In an article published by Ștefan Bacu at *Radio România Internațional*, he says that in fact the two rival groups are called *malănci* and that, in the past, they were symbolic representations of the *New Year* and the *Old Year*. By tradition, the *Old Year* should lose the fight so that the new one can be rich and prosperous.

All these reports mix truth and fiction, factual observation and de-contextualized statements made by villagers, so that the resulting overall representation can only cause perplexity, confusion and wonder. In fact, the name of this tradition is not *Malanca*, but *Confruntare Tradițională cu Bâte/ eng. Traditional Battle with Clubs*. But locals use other alternative terms when referring to the ritual. The most frequent terms are: *traditional fight*, *mummers' fight*, *mummers' battle*, *battle with clubs*, *mummers' traditional battle with clubs*

and *mummers' morning battle*. On the other hand, it is true that the mummers' battle is in fact part of a manifold ritual complex that includes *Malanca*, too, and also another ritual called *Târâitul* (both of them in the category of ritual *urături* performed by peasants on the last day of December and the first two days of January). However, the name of *Malanca* is never used by villagers when talking about the *Traditional Battle with Clubs*.

Finally, the assumption that there is ethnographic data about this custom is also false. Serious ethnographic sources regarding the ritual are completely absent, and most of the press materials about the meaning and sequence of the ritual stages are distorted presentations of reality, too. Thus, the moment of hitting the ground with the clubs happens throughout the whole ritual, from its very beginning when the masks and clubs are created, to the moment prior to the battle (for intimidating the rival group), and much less after the battle, contrary to what the press release mentioned above specified.

Among the decent information found in the media, some try to reveal the nature of the confrontation, relating it to what villagers say and to the history of the place. In such an article, we read that “Villagers are not allowed to interfere in favor of any of the teams... The ones acknowledged as winners have the privilege to choose the most beautiful girls for the upcoming balls ([www.novaappolonia.ro](http://www.novaappolonia.ro))”. Other websites – including the prestigious national publication *Adevărul* – adds that “According to tradition, each year the winners have the privilege to organize balls where they invite the girls they want... Winners take precedence in asking the girls to marry and in organizing balls ([www.adevarul.ro](http://www.adevarul.ro)).” The main two statements mentioned above are in huge contrast with the actual observations on the battle, but also with the field data about the proposal and marriage rituals in Ruginoasa area, gathered from multiple sources.

Even if some locals have repeatedly said that the traditional battle follows certain rules well supported by the comună's traditions, the image of the battle I got after field observations during many consecutive years proved we are rather dealing with a chaotic and brutal confrontation, with just few rules, where tens of unmasked peasants interfere actively in favour of their mummers' group and contribute decisively to the final outcome of the battle. Meanwhile, the information about the winners' privilege for organizing balls in the comună is quite laughable. This is only the result of a series of statements journalists took from elder locals, and supported by the ex-mayor, Ionel Muraru. Out of context and transplanted in the accounts about the current ethnographic reality of the battle, this data

undermines any trace of deontology both for field reporters and article writers. In fact, there are no more balls in Ruginoasa ever since the 1960s, and the rules, values and social networks in the comună becoming active during important events for the village world (such as proposal and marriage) are much more complex and cannot be encompassed by a single ritual such as a *Mummers' Battle* on December the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Last but not least, a series of confusions the press did concerning the place of the battle complete the general picture of the outsiders' misunderstandings of the ritual and the confronting groups. „The ones in Văleni tried to escape the gendarmes in order to get to Deleni, but because there was no way they could make it, fighting began inside the team ([www.ziaruldeiasi.ro](http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro))”, an article in *Ziarul de Iași* explains. Although most televisions and newspapers name the *Mummers' Fight* „the battle in Ruginoasa”, only few know that the event actually takes place in the village of Dumbrăvița, belonging to Ruginoasa comună. Even fewer outsiders know that this comună comprises four villages one of which is called Ruginoasa – just like the comună itself – and that the mummers' battle, filmed each year by televisions, does not take place in this village. Furthermore, there are journalists such as those from *Ziarul de Iași*, who believe that Deleni and Văleni are in fact the names of two distinct villages in Ruginoasa comună. Actually, *deleni* and *văleni* are just two symbolic names that the two mummers' groups in Dumbrăvița village take in order to define their identity as fighters. The reason is that one of the two confronting groups lives in the hilly part of the village – *deal*, whereas the other lives in the southern part, symbolically known as *vale* (eng. *valley*).

The striking fact is that even experienced folklorists that were familiar with the ritual showed a hostile attitude towards it, describing it as “a silly tradition that is not representative for the people in Ruginoasa” because “they have other beautiful traditions that they should perform and promote during the New Year” (Aurel Ardelean, 60 years old, Iași City, July 15, 2015, Interview). This kind of vision, coming from certain professional folklorists, increased the doubts and confusions surrounding the *Mummers' Battle*.

Next to this whole series of quite recent newspapers articles and opinions, some halucinating articles published on blogs and less popular websites contributed to inflaming the talks about the Ruginoasa mummers' battle. Perhaps the most relevant example in this respect is Gheorghe Șeitan's article called *Malanca de la Ruginoasa, un ritual antic dedicat zeului get al războiului*/ eng. *The Malanca in Ruginoasa, an Ancient Ritual Dedicated to the*

*Dacian God of War*. In his article, not only does the author mistake the *Mummers' Battle* in Ruginoasa for the *Malanca* ritual within the same *comună*, but he also states that there is a direct connection between a series of ancient Egyptian and Dacian rituals and the *Battle of Ruginoasa*, supporting the idea with „logical” arguments and historical „proofs”. Quoting Herodotus’ *Histories*, the author emphasizes morphological similarities between this kind of ancient battles with clubs – like the one in Papremis, Egypt, dedicated to god Ares, and the ritual of the *Mummers' Battle* in Ruginoasa. Based on these „undeniable” morphological similarities, and some quotes taken from Herodotus, the author concludes that the present battle of Ruginoasa is nothing else than an archaic ritual that has somehow survived during millenia and managed to keep its almost unaltered form to these days:

«The ones from that place say that the feast is held because of the following reason: inside this temple, the mother of Ares used to live. After having grown up far from her and reaching the age of manhood, the god came to the temple to see her. Since they had not seen him before, his mother’s servants did not let him in, but sent him away. Coming back with people from another town, he beat the servants and got to his mother. They say the custom of the battle with clubs on the day when Ares is celebrated comes from that happening.»

So, Herodotus informs us quite explicitly that the feast was dedicated to Ares, god of war, an important information that should be the starting point in understanding the ritual event called *Malanca in Ruginoasa*.

Yet, knowing that historians specialized in Antiquity proved that the Greek Ares was not an autochthonous Greek deity, but was imported from Thracia, it becomes clearer that, amazingly enough, after millennia, a ritual dedicated to the Thraco-Dacian god of war is preserved; this conclusion stems not only from the similitude in the sequence development of the ritual, but also from other details that we shall refer to further on (<https://oceanopotamos.wordpress.com/2008/>).

All these hesitations, confusions, misunderstandings and phantasmagoria on the *Mummers' Battle* in Ruginoasa *comună*, transformed a simple rural ritual with local symbolic values, into a national event corresponding to the postsocialist unrest where the moral and social crisis was expressed through a chase of the authentic and the sensational. Many times in postsocialist times, the authentic and the sensational became the sides of the same coin, offering a reference or at least a temporary consolation to many people in a world fallen into economic, social and ethic decay. Surprisingly, the battle in Ruginoasa could embody both

the authentic and the sensational. For some Romanians, the primitive aspect of the young mummers wearing hideous masks made of sheep skin and fighting with *acaccia* clubs 2 meters high, spoke about an archaic world where manhood and dignity were won in fair fight, clubs in hand, not with tricks and guile like in the wild post-1989 capitalism. Meanwhile, the image of mummers – a symbol of maleness and virility – was perceived as authentic because it embodied an ancient manhood model, bringing to mind medieval and ancient battles where people – especially men – knew how to behave, unlike the doubtful, depressed and anguished individuals of modern times.

On the other hand, there were also Romanians who asked insistently for the ritual to be banned, labelling it as barbarian and inadequate to the contemporary world where conflicts are being mediated by the police or in court. The strongest voices on this side launched long and relentless speeches against the battle, calling it „a shitty tradition” and „a typical idiocy”; the performers were described as „idiots”, „insane” and „brainless”, and Ruginoasa comună as „village of stupid people”. Nevertheless, within the two sides of the battle, the admirers of the confrontation and its opponents proved to be just as active on blogs, commenting at every video recording of the battle published on YouTube or on newspaper or television websites, blogs or other electronic resources mentioning the *Battle in Ruginoasa*.

These polemic discussions and the impossibility of an agreement regarding the battle of Ruginoasa is representative for the tensions and discrepancies in the Romanian society after the fall of Communism where, faced with an unusual event, the serious effort to analyze and understand it was replaced by either exaltation or complete rejection through slander and insults. All these elements produced a social phenomenon that has long surpassed Ruginoasa and even the county’s borders, turning into a subject of national dispute between the two sides. The case could also be called *The Battle of Ruginoasa*, although many of the disputes go much beyond the geographic and cultural borders of the rural settlement Ruginoasa in Eastern Romania. Faced with the complex social phenomenon symbolically called *The Battle of Ruginoasa*, post-1989 mass media could not remain an unbiased arbitrator that would help understanding it with a lucid and analytical mind; instead, it managed to inflate spirits, transforming a local tradition into a sensational news, making it ambiguous and harder to decipher even for experienced researchers.

Simultaneously, the great mediatization of the ritual led to significant changes in the actors forming the triangle that produces and reproduces an act of violence. To be more

specific, the actors of Riches' triangle of violence – formed by the victim, the aggressor and the observer – (Riches 1986) has changed. Obviously, transporting the battle from a small village where it used to be seen only by villagers, to the national television screens increased the number of viewers, changed the way the event used to be perceived (through mass media rather than directly), and the quality of the observers (urban and national audience rather than local). These major changes in one of the triangles' corners – that of the observer – produced significant changes also in the way aggressors perceived the act of violence itself and the victim. As Whitehead well observed, discussing more forms of violence around the world, mass media always play a decisive (but not always positive) role when it comes to analyzing and debating forms of violence:

[A]ll these specific forms of violence are not produced by the febrile excess of savage or pathological minds but are cultural performances whose poetics derive from the history and sociocultural relationships of the locale. However, representations of such intimate violence are also globalized through the media so that the intimacy of local violence is paraded on a global stage (Whitehead 2004:74).

Precisely because of this, I decided to analyze deeply this ritual in the following pages, and, according to my information, this enterprise is the first ethnographic description of the *Battle in Ruginoasa*.

## **2. The Geography and History of the Battle in Ruginoasa**

More than in other rural rituals I had had the chance to study, the geography and history of Ruginoasa comună are extremely relevant for understanding the confrontation of the two groups of mummers. I reached these conclusions after very long talks with various villagers on the topic. One of the most competent connoisseurs of the local geography and history proved to be Mihai Lupu, primary school teacher born in Ruginoasa in 1940, who managed to acquire a well articulated representation of the ritual over a lifetime spent within the locality's perimeter. Despite the life experience within the comună and the very well thought discourse of this remarkable intellectual and book author, it took me several hours of interviewing and more discussions to understand thoroughly where, when and how the events connected to the history of Ruginoasa and the mummers' battle had taken place.

The complexity of certain events in the history of the *comună*, the details about the unfolding of the traditional battle and especially its displacement from one village to another



over a few decades resulted in a puzzle whose solution I discovered with great difficulty and after a relatively long period of time. In the following lines, I will try to retrace this landscape so that any outsider reading these pages could get an overall picture of the ritual's evolution during an entire century. I start this story by presenting Mihai Lupu's point of view, a synthesis of the few hours of discussions and interviews that he was kind and patient enough to offer me. This shall play the important part of introduction to the geography and history of the traditional battle.

The comună of Ruginoasa comprises four villages: Dumbrăvița, Rediu, Vascani and Ruginoasa. In the past, the village of Ruginoasa was also called Bugioaia, and even today locals use this name when talking to one another about the village. Vascani is slightly different because it became part of the Ruginoasa comună in 1968 when a series of administrative and territorial changes happened in Romania. Until then, Vascani had belonged to Hărmănești comună. Because of this particular reason, Vascani is the only village among the four that does not have and has never had the tradition of the *Mummers' Battle*; however, it has the *Deer*, a custom extinct today in the other villages of the comună.

Back in the 1950s, when I was a child, there used to be a battle between the mummers in Bugioaia and the ones in Rediu. This traditional battle was mostly due to the fact that the young men in Rediu used to visit the girls in Bugioaia and, similarly, the lads in Bugioaia used to visit the girls in Rediu. In case a man from Rediu, for instance, seduced a girl from Bugioaia, the young men in her village would be ashamed, and the expression they would use for the situation was: *He stole our fox!* Thus the battle was a sort of reaction against these incursions. But the confrontation took the shape of a ritual and always happened on the morning of December the 31<sup>st</sup>.

The young men who would take part in the ritual were usually with the military service done or a shortwhile before it. They used to wear multicoloured clothers like those nomad gypsies (*căldărari*) wore when they roamed the villages to sell objects to our villagers. Among the things they sold, there were also pots (usually known as *căldări*) and this explains the name given to the gypsies doing this kind of commerce. They would also sell a very interesting type of brushes for whitewashing, called *badanale*; these were not like the ones we have nowadays (with a short handle), but had a 1 meter long handle and were made out of horse hair. So, the young men joining

the battle were armed with these *badanale*<sup>27</sup> that imitate the brushes that the *căldărari* gypsies used to sell back then. But these tools were not used to fight; they were rather meant to impress the opponents. They were held with the brush upwards and resembled flags such as *Dracon* – fabulous animal with a wolf head and snake body carried by Dacians on top of clubs during battles. This meant they functioned as a kind of scarecrows. But nowadays a whole country gets scared when seeing the youngsters in Ruginoasa rising their clubs. But these weapons are not as dangerous as people believe. Because the risen clubs are rather meant to intimidate. Besides these brushes, the men involved in the fight used to wear the so-called *șuhoai* around their waist. The *șuhoai* were large bronze bells with smaller bells inside, and they sounded terrific when the fighters ran, jumped or even just moved. Finally, the young men also had whips that were actually the main weapon in the battle back then.

In the 1950s, the battle rather meant pushing and whipping. If the *Bugioieni* (the inhabitants of Bugioaia village) crossed the stone bridge – also called *bolta de la Heleșteni* – and managed to go halfway up the hill to Rediu, this meant the *Rădenii* (inhabitants of Rediu) were beaten. If, on the contrary, the *Rădenii* crossed the stone bridge and reached the mill near the train station, it meant the *Bugioieni* were beaten. That moment, the battle would stop and they would go to have a glass of wine together. This meant actually that the confrontation was not motivated by hatred. So, in the beginning, the battle only took place between two villages: Bugioaia – nowadays called Ruginoasa – and Rediu – the southernmost village in the Ruginoasa comună and the closest to Heleșteni, the neighboring comună. The *Dumbrăvițeni* (inhabitants of Dumbrăvița) had not joined the battle at first because they had Ukrainian origins and would not interfere at all with the Romanians. Likewise, for a long time, until around the 1950s and a little bit after, Romanians would not interfere with them either. Back then, villages were more isolated because the population was smaller than today when nobody really knows exactly where a village ends and another one begins because of the large number of houses. Back then, all that was between the villages was an empty field. So, later on, around 1970, the *Dumbrăvițeni* entered the battle, too. And the history of the comună explains this fact quite well.

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<sup>27</sup> *Badana/Badanale* (plural) – A one-meter long stick with horse hair at one end, which is held together with a metal ring. Used in the past as a painting instrument, it is now only present on festive occasions such as the winter rituals of the Moldavian region.

The Rădeni have always been hardworking people who encouraged their children to learn. And their children got to be among the first in college, too. Thus, they gradually distanced themselves of the traditional battle and, around the early 1970s, quit it completely. Slowly, simultaneous to this tendency and to the disappearance of the „enemies” in Rediu, the Dumbrăvițeni started to create their own tradition of the battle. By the late 1970s, clubs were introduced into the battle – a new invention of the Dumbrăvițeni, I would say. In Dumbrăvița, the battle was between *deal* (the hill) and *vale* (the valley); in other words, between the inhabitants of the same village, divided into the ones living in the hilly side of the village, and the ones downhill, in *vale*, close to the castle of Cuza, the Romanian ruler, situated at the border with the village of Ruginoasa. This is actually the battle that the televisions started to record and that came to public attention in recent years. Once this tradition was founded in Dumbrăvița, the people in Ruginoasa village followed the example and started to fight, too, since their village had a *deal* and a *vale*, too (smaller than the other village, though). The *Deal* in Ruginoasa goes north from the railway until the driveway to Pașcani; the *Vale* is to the south, towards the area called Dealul Drăghici, next to the archaeological center of the comună, to the south of Heleşteni. But the battles here happen at a smaller scale than in Dumbrăvița.

The battle also has a symbolic dimension, meaning that the participants pay for all their deeds throughout the year; for instance, if some of them went to the other village to see the girls or things like that. Therefore, they say that after the battle one can enter the *New Year* with a clean soul. There are also other symbols in their outfits. The *Old Year* is represented by ugly and rough masks made of sheep skin and fur, worn by the fighters in the morning. But in the afternoon, things change. The ones that join the ritual called *Malanca* show up dressed with beautiful and expensive clothes, prepared in detail, and their masks are decorated with colourful beads and ribbons. In fact, all these represent the *New Year* - beautiful, young, just beginning” (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, series of interviews taken between July 17, 2015, and May 4, 2017).

Mihai Lupu’s panoramic vision of the battle in Ruginoasa *comună* prepares the field and eliminates a series of misunderstandings regarding the location of the fight and the way it has transformed during the last six decades. Just like Emilian Marcu, my first interviewee, whose point of view on the battle I presented in Chapter I, Mihai Lupu was rather inclined to present

the violences during the battle through the lenses provided by symbolism and an archaic cosmogony about the birth of the New Year, but also by emphasizing the strict rules of tradition that are meant to prevent very violent and brutal behaviors.

I have noticed this kind of attitude with most of my interviewees, and I explain it best with the help of the *cultural violence* concept, coined by sociologist Johan Galtung. He defines cultural violence as „those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 1990:291). It seems that the *comună*’s inhabitants have created a sort of specific ideology that makes the violence of the battle with clubs become invisible or at least justifiable.

I have noticed this vision in persons of both genders, very different ages – from 18 to 90. Gica Lupu, a 57 years old teacher in the village of Rediu, declared the following:

I agree with this battle. I have liked all our winter traditions and I believe that this 10 seconds spark, this impact has to happen. And I think this comes from the fact that my dad had taken me to see this battle ever since I was a three years old little girl, and he showed me their costumes and explained their behavior to me. He would tell me: «Look, these ones are coming from up the hill, and these ones from down the valley, and then they are going to clash.» This was somewhere around 1960-65, for I am born in 1955. In 1965 they would still fight with whips” (Gica Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

A mask maker in whose house I had the privilege to see the last stage in the process of mask making, on December the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011, made a similar statement:

There is no definite purpose of the battle. It is a tradition coming from our ancestors. It’s always been like that. There’s a sort of pride in winning it. But the hatred does not make it to the next year. Nobody has ever died during the battle. Maybe someone broke an arm, hurt a finger, etc. *For you cannot stay in the rain without getting wet* (Romanian proverb), that’s not possible. Those that fight better and remain standing stiffer win, while the rest lose and ran to their side of the village. Sometimes they

throw stones at each other, but usually this doesn't happen. Sometimes civilians<sup>28</sup> also get into the battle (Ion, mask maker, 48 years old, Dumbrăvița village, December 30, 2011, Interview).

A councilor from the village of Dumbrăvița, also present there for finishing the masks, brought a traditional-symbolic vision of the battle, too:

The ugly masks worn by the fighters represent the *Old Year* and with the morning battle we chase the *Old Year* away, together with all the evil in the village. And for the *Malancă* we bring our beautiful masks representing in fact the *New Year* with its new, beautiful face and with hope. Therefore, it is not about hatred. Later on, we meet to drink some wine, to laugh of one another. That's how it should actually be” (Vasile, councilor in Ruginoasa *comună*, 52 years old, December 30, 2011, Interview).

All the statements made by my interviewees correspond with the conceptual framework designed by Galtung when framing cultural violence.

Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong... One way, cultural violence works by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being ‘murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong’. Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent” (Idem 1990:292).

Obviously, the talks with the villagers in Ruginoasa *comună* had a significant impact on the journalists reporting on the battle. Almost all the field coverage included – in a distorted and misinforming manner – fragments about the relation between the violence of the battle and the village traditions. Although the reporters' initial idea was to have a sensational news, the final outcome was, in most cases, the lack of transparency about the violent acts, creating a total discrepancy between the facts presented and their “deeper” meaning in the *comună*' set of traditions. But in my case, as an anthropologist, the superficial outsiders analyses of the violence made me dig deeper into the history of this rural settlement in order to discover data

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<sup>28</sup> Civilians - the locals of Ruginoasa always make a crucial distinction, using terms from the military jargon, between masked fighters - those who should be active combatants - and civilians. The civilians are the villagers who, according to tradition, should only watch the battle and not participate. The involvement of civilians in this confrontation was severely criticized by many villagers during the interviews and discussions I had with them. Still, their presence among fighters is constant in the last years

that would clarify this aggressiveness and its causes. My initial assumption was that there had to be a long history of violence that gave locals the time to get used to its effects and, later on, to justify it by means of an ideology anchored in local traditions.

### **3. A History of Vendetta and Cultural Violence in Ruginoasa Battle with Clubs**

When studying old documents and writings about Ruginoasa, there is plenty of information about acts of physical violence, but images about the bravery and fighting nature of the comună's inhabitants are also present.

One of the classics of Romanian literature, Ion Creangă mentions Ruginoasa briefly in his monumental work *Childhood Memories* published in 1892 where he narrated events happening around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In the fourth part of this autobiography, Creangă describes his passage through Ruginoasa comună, together with some fellows, and includes it in the larger description of the journey from his native village, Humulești, to Iași – Moldova's capital – where he was supposed to start studying to become a priest:

And as soon as we were out on the high-road by good fortune we came upon some men with cartloads of shingles driving to Iași. We travelled with them for fear of the gypsies of Ruginoasa and we made splendid progress till, at daybreak, there we were at Târgu-Frumos where we forthwith split a few water-melons to quench our thirst and still our hunger. Then when the horses were somewhat rested, on we went toward Podu-Iloaiei, and from there still further on to Iași, more often walking than driving, for old Luca's horses has grown very weak, and the peasants coming and going, who're fond of joke, would make biting remarks, so that we were uncomfortable because of old Luca's shame (Creangă 1978).

The rough reputation of the people from Ruginoasa is mentioned also by Boris Crăciun, historian and author of the monograph dedicated to the comună. The locals' fighting spirit is described by the author when speaking about *The Big Peasant Riot of 1907*. The spark that created the riot, Crăciun tells us, appeared in Northern Moldova and from there it spread to Suceava county of which Ruginoasa was part at that time.

It was the spring of 1907. On Thursdays, people used to go to Târgu-Frumos where a fair was held. Here, in February, they found out about the outbreak of the riot in Flămânzi, Frumușica, Stroiiești and other localities in Northern Moldova. The news came exactly when the peasants felt the knife had reached bone in the village. From

the counties of Botoșani, Dorohoi and Iași, the riot spread to Suceava, and the signal was given by the peasants in Ruginoasa (Crăciun 1969).

Further on, Crăciun gives an account of the events in Ruginoasa where peasants destroyed the landlords' registers that kept the cumbersome debts the locals had to pay to landholders. One of the extensively discussed events, later promoted by the Romanian communist ideology, took place on March the 3<sup>rd</sup>. That day, the peasants in Ruginoasa allied with the railway workers from the Pașcani station and tried to liberate 15 peasants from Ruginoasa considered to be the heads of the Ruginoasa riot. The ones arrested were about to be sent to the town of Fălticeni where they would be judged. The soldiers appointed to keep the train safe were forced to open fire and wounded severely a railway worker. The event was later included in history textbooks during the Communist Era and provided an example of the brotherhood between peasants and workers in the fight against the common enemy, namely the capitalist exploiter (Idem 1969:63-64).

These writings depict the peasants of Ruginoasa as rough and courageous, and, more than that, as people used to perceive violence as a legitimate solution to either personal or social problems (Martin, Harrod, and Pérez 2013). The oral history of Ruginoasa also mentions other events that have to do with the violence in the locality's past, including the origin of the *Mummers' Battle*. One of the most interesting accounts in this respect goes back in time, presenting events from the early 20th century, involving the local landlords and the peasants in Ruginoasa. This account was collected from Michi Balcan, inhabitant of Dumbrăvița village, who claims the story was transmitted to him via his paternal grandfather. I heard the same account, with slight variations, in other two sources, both in Dumbrăvița - a proof that the story is quite popular among locals.

Around 1900-1910, there were two landlords, Teodorescu and Sturza, owning several hundred hectares. These fields had to be protected of the thieves who would sometimes ran into the crops during harvesting. So, these boyars had appointed guards in the fields. And the chosen guards were the handiest and strongest young men, especially those without family obligations, that could thus spend more nights guarding without having to explain this to their wife and family. Thus, youngsters like these were usually recruited as guardsmen. Well, the guardsmen appointed by the two boyars would also go to the local bars to warm up next to a glass of hot wine. And the guards of the two teams used to meet there. At the bar, people would sometimes talk

about which team is better, which men are stronger. This is how many fights began, such as wrestling to see who is the strongest and, consequently, the best guardsman. Others would also do arm wrestling. Sometimes, these meetings resulted in more serious fights that were later transformed in collective battles between the lads uphill and the ones downhill. The explanation is that one of the boyars had land uphill to the north of Dumbrăvița, while the other one's land was located more downhill, to the south. So, the boyar in the north appointed rather lads from the *deal*, while the one in the south appointed young people from the *vale*. This is how the rivalry between *deal* and *vale* began in the village of Dumbrăvița. (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

Mihai Balcan, local of Dumbrăvița, aged 50, was one of the active fighters of the team in the *vale* when he was young. Over time, he managed to get a well defined and informed vision on the fighting mummers' world. His stories have valuable information about the battle's history and especially about its transition from wrestling to whips and from whips to clubs.

My grandfather joined this wrestling type of competitions that also had whips. They also had masks back then. My granddad put on his mask, so did my dad and so did I for 9 years, from 1979 until about 1987. I experienced the time between the whips and the clubs. But in the beginning the clubs were shorter, thinner, more decent. They were not longer than the whip's handle. It's fascinating to know how they got from whips to clubs (*măciuci*). When I was a small child, around the year 1965-70, a clever young man made a longer handle to his whip. And that year he beat everyone. The ones who had lost the battle designed longer handles for their whips the following year. And they continued like this each year, until they reached a moment when these could no longer be of use as handles for whips. Then the fighters started using them as clubs. Personally, I lived times when I had a club on my left hand and a whip on the right (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

The transition from whips to clubs is explained by other locals through the existence of a local vendetta between two large families in the village, which transformed the traditional fair-play confrontation into a rough fight thirsty of revenge.

In the past, the fight was not carried with clubs, but with whips, and mummers also wore bells on them. Until 1975-1976, it was still with whips. That was also when the murder of a villager named Maghercă took place. Two families that had been in



conflict for many years met. Being drunk, on the evening of January the 1<sup>st</sup>, when the *Malănci teams* were walking around the village, they started arguing and the members of the Cernăuțeanu family hit Maghercă in the head with a club, so hard that his eye was plucked and, if I remember well, the man eventually died. The aggressor spent about 20 years in prison. But, if I remember well, from that moment on these families became thirstier of revenge year by year. Around the following year, clubs appeared; it must've been around 1976. So it's possible that the battle with clubs started in 1977. From this grudge between the two families, the battle amplified each year. Maghercă and Cernăuțeanu were two larger families in the *Ruginoasa comună*. Being so large, they got more people involved into the end of year fight. And so people started to join in more and more, and since the village of Dumbrăvița was split in two – *dealul* and *valea* – the two teams started to fight (Dumitru Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

The communist period generally represented an important stage in the development of the *Mummers' Battle*. Despite the strong policed state Romania was (Deletant 1999), the *Battle of Ruginoasa* was allowed to go on by communist authorities. Older locals who lived those times explain the situation.

During communist times, the battle between *deal* and *vale* was allowed to happen. People also wore bells – called *șuhoai* – around their waists and these produced a noise that reached far. This way, the militia always knew where the fighters were. But mummers were allowed to meet. And usually the militia just watched the whole fight that ended up without any victims. Communist authorities were just interested in preventing something against their power and domination. Therefore, they issued a law in the 1950s stating that any public manifestation where more than three people gathered in one place had to notify the town hall before it happened, and the institution would issue a certificate explaining the meeting. This was how they tried to control village traditions, not only *The Battle*, but also the other winter traditions such as *Malanca*, *The Goat*, *The Deer*, *The Bears*, etc. (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).”

However, communist times also brought harsh measures against the fighters of the two teams – the *deal* and the *vale*. The ones involved in the confrontation remember the details of these events:

During Communism, you did not know what to expect from the militia. If the chief of the militia in Pașcani wanted to see the battle because he was fond of it, their measures were kinder. If not, he was tough with us. Yet, back then people were afraid of the law, afraid of the militia. The militia was very strong and could arrest whoever they wanted. If somebody was rude to them before or after the morning battle, they would take that person to their van right away. Sometimes they would even keep him all the New Year night under arrest only to let go out one or two days later. The whole village suffered for him. Even his opponents. Because we were always thinking: «See, I'm having fun, drinking, eating, and poor him is arrested.» There were a few such arrests. (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

Furthermore, communist authorities knew how to exploit the violent acts during the battle to their own politic benefit, as Costică Nechifor, a 65 years old living in Dumbrăvița, explains in an interview. All this political manipulation of the violent persons involved in the *Mummers' Battle* resulted in an inflammation of the battle's level of violence in the following years.

Forty years ago, when I was young, the custom of fighting with clubs did not exist. The opponents only had whips and whipped one another. When I was a child, the locals of Rediu met the ones of Bugioaia, and they would fight with whips. I recall quite well an episode where the *bugioieni* chased the *rădeni* uphill to Rediu. The whips could only cause bruises, but would never break limbs or skulls like they do now. I only remember one battle as violent as the one we had a few days ago. It happened right before the collectivisation and it was dreadful, with poles and clubs. In other words, very similar to the one nowadays. A young man in Ruginoasa, member of the Bârloi family, was hit with the club close to his ear; the ear was broken and he was left deaf afterwards. Others were taken to the hospital, too, so it was pretty bad. The *colectivisation* of agriculture [for references on collectivization topic see (Iordachi and Dobrinu 2009)] was done here in 1962, so this was a bit before, perhaps even the winter before, in 1961. I remember that the mayor of Ruginoasa was a man called Toarbă Vasile. The militia men that were sent on the spot were also insulted by the mummers in the village. Some of the militia were taken the pistols and had the guns thrown into a well, others were harassed and pushed around. Afterwards, the authors of the violent acts were caught and the militia, together with the legal authorities in the comună, made an agreement: «*We don't send you to prison, but you are going to be responsible for the collectivization of the comună!*» In a way, they

made them do it because they had the means and knew how. These roughnecks were sent to the locals that had to be convinced to enter the *Colectiv*. If you did not want to enter the *Colectiv*, these guys beat you so hard that you lost your senses and finally accepted.<sup>29</sup> So my belief is that from that moment on, the morning battle on December the 31<sup>st</sup> became increasingly violent (Costică Nechifor, 65 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

All these happenings tell a story of violence in Ruginoasa *comună*, a place known for its hot-spirited inhabitants ever since Ion Creangă's times. In other words, over time, the people of Ruginoasa have become renowned as fierce people that currently use violence for managing conflicts with other people. During my field research, I had the opportunity to check this assumption many times. The weekly market, for instance, held every Wednesday at the Heleşteni village's margin, was the place where the inhabitants of Ruginoasa also used to come to sell their agricultural products. More than once, the friends accompanying me drew my attention to the potentially aggressive behavior of the people from Ruginoasa: "Take care and don't stand in front of this guy's carriage for he has a registration plate from Ruginoasa and he may hit you; these guys are not quite sane". Another time, while visiting a family in Heleşteni I observed the anxious behavior of their four year old niece. One of the family members tried to make an excuse mumbling that: "There's nothing one can do about this girl. She's like this all the time. It's obvious that her mom comes from Ruginoasa. For that's how those guys are – a bit crazy!" In addition, I have many times heard various locals of Heleşteni using expressions like this one: "What the hell should we do? Argue like stupid people? We're not like the ones in Ruginoasa!".

Nevertheless, the violent acts during the 2011 battle caused perplexity even among the people of Ruginoasa, going much beyond the ordinary villagers' power of understanding. On the days following this battle, but also in the months to come, I managed to take a series of interviews of many locals. The violence of that particular battle between the two groups had left deep marks in the memory of the villagers witnessing the events:

I was the one who wiped the blood pouring from the nose, ears and mouth of a guy who was severely beaten in the battle. I washed him with water next to a well, I wiped him afterwards... I still have the t-shirt I was wearing back then. It's still full of

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<sup>29</sup> For more information about collectivization in Romania see Verdery and Kligman's book *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962*

blood... From that turmoil he came directly to me. In the moment I saw him in that state, I moved him aside and took him somewhere else, and then I washed him until he came back to his senses. He had fallen and all the other ones coming from uphill hit him repeatedly with their clubs. Eventually, a woman from the village stopped those hitting him and that's how he managed to escape. In the end, after I washed him, the ambulance from Pașcani arrived and took him to the hospital... Usually, it's people with little education that get involved in this battle. If there were a decent mayor, the battle would only happen between mummies. I believe that right now this battle should only happen when the police and the gendarms are here (Nechifor Gabi, 35 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

I got a similar and very lucid prediction of *Ruginoasa's Battle* fate from Mr. Michi Balcan during an interview. Here is his declaration just three days after the battle:

After everything that has happened this year, I say it's the last year the battle takes place. I believe the Prefecture of the Iași County will issue a special law that forbids this battle forever. Or they shall bring here every year huge troops of gendarmes that would prevent the battle from happening. For I have never seen what I could witness this year: civilians and mummies hitting anyone, even the ones fallen to the ground. And if the *deleni* had won this year, they should have gone to the *comună* hall afterwards and carol the mayor, wait for the music and the *Malănci teams* and celebrate their victory in a beautiful way. Instead, they went to a neighboring street and made even more victims. Then they continued somewhere else in the village and beat some young men there, too. Even I, though local counselor and representative of the *comună* hall, was scared of them and ran away. They did not care that I was over fifty and father of children their age. They would have hit me, too, to chill down. And I saw how, at a given moment, heading towards the *comună* hall, they took their masks off, showing everybody they were the winners and the toughest. Meanwhile, had they caught even civilians from the *vale* they would have beat those, too... I had been a mummy for years in the past, and I can say that I'm no fearful guy. I even did wrestling in the past and I can say that I'm quite fit even now when I'm fifty. But this year one of my brothers joined the battle and I was terrified that he might get caught in a hustle and crippled, and I would not be able to do anything for him. Since certain civilians tried to save the mummies fallen to the ground wounded, they were hit, too. Well, I could say this year was the first time I was afraid. And I think you, as a

witness there of all the events, you know well why. My eyes have never seen something similar to what happened this year. First of all, there were more civilians than mummers armed with clubs, and they were all as involved in the battle as the mummers. So both civilians and mummers in both teams were fighting, and nobody could have told who the civilian and the mummer were, and who was fighting whom. This is not a fair-play match anymore. It's just human evil and stupid thirst for revenge. This time eight people went to the hospital – mummers and civilians together. That's not a thing to do anymore (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

Intriguingly enough, many locals of both genders reached similar conclusions, without being nonetheless capable of offering a valid explanation for the radicalization of the battle.

Now I find this battle rougher, sillier and more meaningless and especially more shameless than ever before. For now they no longer care where and whom they hit. As a fighter, you have to think that there is a human being behind the mask. No matter how many sorrows and quarrels you've had throughout the year with somebody, you still have to behave humanly in those moments. You should not only think about the revenge. Because I have the impression that now this battle is just a kind of revenge. It seems that in the past the battle used to be more connected to manhood and supremacy, not with revenge. But look how two years ago many were taken by ambulances, and the same thing happened last year on December the 31<sup>st</sup>. So this is how things are. Besides rumor went that here in Ruginoasa we are barbarian and so on. I believe it's not normal for a young man like the one beaten last year to be left with marks for the rest of his life. As I said before, I would not like this tradition to vanish, but I would not like it to stay like it is right now. This New Year tradition opens in fact all the New Year rituals and that's why it is important for us (Gica Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

So far, I have presented the image of the ritual violence in the *Mummers' Battle with Clubs* as seen only through the eyes of the villagers. In order to complete the picture, the perspective of an external witness of this confrontation could not be absent. It belongs to the anthropologist himself, whose eyes have seen unfolding some of the most brutal episodes of the battle in its entire history of the last several decades. However, the exact way they were

perceived on the spot, right after the ritual event had taken place, represents an important piece of the whole puzzle described until now.

#### **4. Physical Violence and Participant Observation in Ruginoasa Battle with Clubs**

Witnessing all the events in the morning of December the 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, I wrote down some fieldnotes that give a clear account of my feelings and emotions before, during and after the battle.

After 6-7 minutes, together with the group of masked fighters and some other villagers, I arrived on the main street of the village. Over there, the group of fighters stopped and the crowd stopped together with them. All the bystanders tried to move to the upper parts of the road so that they would have the best possible view of the battle. Most of these people either had small cameras with them or used their cell phones to take pictures or videos of the group of fighters. But the fighters were moving up and down the street and every person in the crowd tried to reposition himself/herself in order to get the best spot to see the battle. As these spots were quite limited, the bystanders ended up pushing each other from all the directions and creating a lot of swarming on both sides of the fighters. The atmosphere became so tense that for me time seemed to expand. In fact, those moments lasted no more than seven minutes. After that, the “enemies” from *the hill* went down toward the group from *the valley*. When the two groups got closer, at about 50 meters’ distance, they started to swear and to threaten each other. This new sequence lasted for about 15 minutes, but once again I had the impression that at least one hour passed by.

Finally, the team from *the hill* decided to attack. Unfortunately, or rather fortunately, I was pushed by the crowd to a place from where I could see almost nothing. The only thing I could do under these circumstances was to lift my camera up, hoping to get some battle scenes. But what I could see from my spot was quite enough for me. I saw the long clubs going up and down like huge relentless hammers, and I correctly assumed that they hit a fighter who had the misfortune to fall on the ground. In the next two-three minutes, the guys from *the valley* were running down, and the group from the hill was pursuing them. Those moments, I was able to see how two men were dragging a motionless body full of blood from the crowd. This scene ravaged my soul. I was running down with most of the crowd, while beside me I heard the fighters from *the hill* screaming: “Kill them, mother fu...s!”, “Catch these assholes!”

and some other very obscene cuss. I did follow the crowd running toward the valley for about one minute. Then, I saw a compact group of about 20 fighters - with and without masks - coming from the valley and running back toward us. The next moment, a shower of stones was swept over us. The guys from *the valley* had been regrouped at a certain point and started to chase the “brave” fighters from the hill right back toward *the hill*. Fortunately, a massive group of gendarmes interfered between these two groups, and I found myself again in the middle of the fighters from *the valley*. The next moment, I saw how these fighters chased an already injured man with white hair and a white coat, and also another wounded 27-35 years old, tall guy. Luckily, both these men had the chance to arrive on their own feet to the gendarmes who made a wall using their bodies and shields, thus blocking the entire street. That moment, as I could see, there were two such gendarmes’ walls that blocked the main road of Dumbrăvița from both directions: *hill* and *valley*. Between these two ‘walls’, there was a distance of 100 meters. Inside this space, there was already an ambulance and only several other people, most of them injured, plus two cameramen. Seeing that, I asked the gendarmes who blocked the valley side of the road to let me get between the barricades. I was the only one who was allowed to pass, although some other people asked the same thing. This happened, of course, because of my camera. When I got close to the ambulance, I saw both the guys who had been chased, now with broken heads, being bandaged by the medical team. Soon after, three people brought a severely injured guy from a house whom I recognized was the same young fighter who was taken out from the crowd by two civilians. The way he looked right now, I was sure that he would not survive. (I found out later that he spent weeks in the hospital with a cranial fracture).

I don’t consider myself a weak person, but what I saw that morning was already too much for me. The only feeling I had was the urge to leave Ruginoasa as soon as possible and to go to Heleşteni where my friends were preparing for the New Year... Nevertheless, my anthropologist mind did not let me go down toward the *comună* hall without observing everything around. While going down toward the center of the locality, I saw a group of five youngsters who were arguing loudly. I stopped nearby and I heard when they said: «*This afternoon we will not let any Malanca team go down the hill. We will stop all of them here!*» *Malanca* is another traditional custom from Ruginoasa that takes place in the afternoon. A *Malanca* is composed of a large

group of young men dressed in nice colorful clothes with beautiful masks decorated with beads, in strong contrast with the ugly, furry big masks that the fighters wear in the morning when they confront each other. *Malanca*, as the people told me a night before in the pub, is like a reconciliation of the villagers after the harsh battle in the morning... So, stopping a *Malanca* stands for an eternal enmity between the two groups of people.

Now, having learnt that these guys from *the valley*, who had lost the fight, have the intention to stop all *Malanca*'s teams from reaching the center of the locality (where they usually performed), I became curious and I decided to come back to Ruginoasa in the afternoon.

Twenty minutes later, I arrived downtown in Ruginoasa. I called my hosts who decided to send Evelina, their older daughter, to pick me up. There are 6 kilometers from the center of Ruginoasa to the border of Heleşteni. So I decided to walk toward Heleşteni while Evelina was coming to pick me up... While I was walking I could not stop thinking about what I saw and I started meditating. Representations of Middle Age fights mentioned in textbooks or movie scenes came to my mind. «What kind of people were those who killed other human beings in a face-to-face contact, stabbing them with swords or smashing their heads with maces? Were they so different from us? And, if not, why was I so impressed by the outcome of the battle in Ruginoasa?», I thought. In any case, I wished I were not there to see so much human hate, cruelty and madness. These were my feelings that moment... About 20-30 minutes after, Evelina came to pick me up. I had already walked two kilometers of the road toward Heleşteni, being already in Reditu, the southern village of Ruginoasa *comună*. There was no traffic at all on that road, which surprised me because I thought some people from Heleşteni would go to see the battle in Ruginoasa. But it seems that all of them had decided to celebrate the New Year together within their family and community” (January 3, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes).

Not only did the battle on December the 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 produce bewilderment among locals, but it also led to understanding lucidly that this tradition could not go on in its actual form. The fact also became obvious for local and county authorities who decided after December 2011 that they should issue a law forbidding this type of battle. The people of Ruginoasa felt regretful and nostalgic about that, since they had been used to the ritual their entire life. As many of



my interviewees mentioned, the morning battle was part of a ritual complex that comprised two other rituals with a theatrical dimension more obvious than in the case of the mummings' battle. These two rituals were *Malanca* and *Târâitul*.

## **5. The Mummings' Battle, Malanca and Târâitul – the Manifold Ritual Complex in Ruginoasa Comună**

Despite the violence it involved, the *Mummings' Battle* is considered to be a winter tradition by the inhabitants of Ruginoasa. During the talks and interviews I had with villagers, many drew my attention to the fact that this custom should be nothing more than a test of manhood and bravery, dominated by fair play because it belongs to a manifold ritual complex that also contains the *Malanca* and the *Târâitul*.

The first time I heard such an assumption was in the evening of December the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 when I had the chance to witness the last stage in the process of mask making for the fighters in the *vale*. One of the fighters that planned to put the mask on the following morning said:

Despite these acts of violence, fighters make up when the battle is over. Because they meet afterwards for the *Malanca* and maybe even join the same team for this ritual. Yet, they can even be relatives and still fight against one another in the morning. In the afternoon they meet in the center, they have a beer or a glass of wine, and the relations between them have to remain decent (Mihai, fighter for the team in *the valley*, December 30, 2011, field notes).

Following the line of logical continuity between the two rituals, I observed similar statements during the interviews, too:

*Malanca* could be considered a sort of reconciliation because the ones who mask themselves in the morning and join the battle, later join the *Malanca*, so they get to visit the houses of the one they had fought with in the morning. And then you ask yourself: what do they do if they get to the house of the one they had beaten in the morning? Do they expect for his relatives to hit them back? Well, there might be exceptions, too, maybe the ones with *Malanca* won't visit the house of a hardly beaten young man like the one whose skull had been fractured in 2011. As for the rest, they go, nobody stops them and they are welcomed almost everywhere (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

Another interviewee argued in the same direction: „Despite the violence during the mummers’ battle, the main idea is that, even if you fight in the morning, in the afternoon, with the *Malanca*, you have to make up (Dumitru Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).”

But the most appealing observation about the relation between *Malanca* and *The Mummers’ Battle* comes from my talk with Mr. Michi Balcan who has joined both rituals many times. As a well-situated local in the social world of Dumbrăvița village, he welcomed the *Malanca* teams for many consecutive years to his own courtyard. “*Malanca* is exactly the opposite of the morning battle. If I, for instance, organize a *Malanca*, even if I am from the valley, I can have five-six young men from the hill in my *Malanca team*. That’s not a problem. Once the *Malanca* begins, all the evil is forgotten and stepped on. This the real beauty of these rituals!” Mr. Michi Balcan declared with a triumphant smile on his face, and then took his idea further.

With the *Malanca*, the war hatchet is buried and all the people on the other side of the village, from the hill, come to me singing and smiling. And I welcome everybody because there is no more problems between us. That’s how *Malanca* has to be. Because if I, for instance, organize *Malanca*, everybody knows I make huge efforts. On this occasion, I have to slaughter a 100-150 kilograms pig, to pay a band of six-seven musicians, to offer five-six meals for all of them. Therefore, nobody is allowed to quarrel within my *Malanca team*, no matter where he comes from, either the hill or the valley. Because this would offend me after spending so much and making an effort so that this ritual can take place (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

But what is actually *Malanca*? One of the few folklorists having researched the ritual of *Malanca*, Horea Barbu Oprișan gives a very expressive depiction of it:

The *Malanca* parade impresses everyone. It looks as if the entire village started to party, cheering up all the ones who stayed at home. *Malanca* is a spectacular manifestation extant in Bukovina. In time, it spread towards the Moldavian areas, until Roman, but not under the forms it has in Bukovina... In the beginning, *Malanca* was a carol and it used to be expressed simply; maybe that is how it arrived or was brought from the North, from the Slavic world. With the time passing, *Malanca* developed its forms, evolving to a parade that looked like a performance with multiple

numbers; nothing is fix. Everything depends on the actors, but especially on the participants (Oprișan 1981).

Many of the observations Oprișan made stand for the *Malanca* in the villages of Ruginoasa too. In Ruginoasa, the *Malanca* teams are big parades with fifteen to twenty-five members, sometimes even thirty. Such a team had two to four *arnăuți*<sup>30</sup> (usually two *in buttons* – dressed in military uniform, and two *in flowers* – dressed in folk costumes), ten-twenty *căldărari* and the music band with four-five musicians usually, including two trumpetists, one or two trombone players (also called *baritons* in local language), one clarinetist and one drummer. The most important team member is the organizing *arnăut* also known as *arnăut-șef*. He is responsible for organizing the whole group and for planning the ritual from A to Z. Therefore, that *Malanca* is named after the family name of that young man. I heard the locals from Ruginoasa saying “Here’s Lupu’s *Malanca*!” or “Cernăuțeanu’s *Malanca* is coming!”

The *arnăutul-șef*, necessarily dressed in buttoned-up *arnăut* clothes, usually takes a close and trustworthy friend to help him, and this one is also dressed in a similar costume. They have to control the ten-fifteen *căldărari* who sometimes tend to be too cheerful and to exit the band when the fanfare is singing and the dance begins. Apart from the fact that they are also dancing, the other two *arnăuți*, also called *arnăuți in flowers*, have to knock at people’s gates and ask if they want to welcome the *Malanca team*. *Căldărarii* are dressed in multicolored costumes, have metal bells around their waists and brushes and rattles in hand. The name of all these characters is strictly linked to the *comună*’s history. We know that the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza had appointed at his court around the palace in Ruginoasa mercenaries of Albanian origin, dressed with specific uniforms, with buttons sewn diagonally on their chest and back. So the *arnăuți in buttons* within the *Malanca* wear exactly this type of military outfit, imitating the uniforms the Albanian mercenaries hired by Cuza Vodă used to wear. The *arnăuți in flowers* wear folk costumes like the ones most of the peasants in Ruginoasa used to wear before World War II. The *căldărari* in the *Malanca* wear, as their own name suggests, the clothes of the nomad gypsies who in the past used to sell various products (like pots, metal and wooden objects, brushes and even rattles – a kind of wooden box with a handle that produces a deafening noise whenever the handle is turned) to peasants. Apart from the music band paid before the ritual by the *arnăut-șef* and composed of older persons, the other team members are youngsters that had reached the age of marriage.

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<sup>30</sup> Arnăut (pl. arnăuți) - mercenaries of Albanian origin present in the Romanian court and army in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before

But this is how the inhabitants of Ruginoasa themselves describe the *Malanca* and its stages:

In November at *Lăsata Secului*, on November the 14<sup>th</sup>, the *arnăuț-șef* has to know whether he wants to organize a *Malanca* or not. He first calls for music bands – the so-called *fanfares* – in neighboring towns such as Roman, Sirețel, Pașcani and even Iași. Such a fanfare costs between 7500-8000 lei (\$1800-2000). The *arnăuț* organizing the *Malanca* pays the mummies that join him according to a sum they decide before, and from the money he receives, a part goes to his band's members, and the rest is his. He is also the one deciding how much each mummer is to be paid. Thus, some mummies could get more if they are good dancers and especially if they are serious (do not drink, do not do stupid things, etc.). Most of the times, *arnăuții-șefi* get their money back and even get a profit. I have rarely heard of *arnăuți* that lose the money invested. If they walk around the entire comună, the *arnăuț-șef* gets all his money back and even some extra. But most often his profit ranges about 1000-2000 lei (\$250-500) for him alone. So the *arnăuț-șef* is a sort of manager who has to share the resources available very well so that in the end some profit is possible. And, in order to do that, he has to choose very well the young men for the team. He has to get those who are resistant, go from house to house, do not lose time chatting uselessly, and do not run the risk of getting drunk, etc. Well, each such team member can even get 100 lei extra from the *arnăuț*. (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

*Malanca* is the longest ritual in the series of winter holiday customs taking place in Ruginoasa.

The *Malanca* starts on December the 31<sup>st</sup> around 5-6 p.m., and finishes on January the 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 2 p.m. During this time, there are some moments of break when the team members rest and eat. The most important break is on the night of December the 31<sup>st</sup>, from 4 a.m. until 8 p.m. when the people in the band go to sleep. Usually they all sleep in the same house, previously chosen by the *arnăuț-șef*. In most cases, it is his parents' house, but it could well be the house of an uncle or a relative if this person agrees, and if the house occupies a strategic place in the comună (a place from where the band can start a route that would bring a larger profit to the *Malanca* led by that *arnăuț* (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).

The most important moments in the *Malanca* ritual are the ones when the group enters the family's courtyard.

In my courtyard, for instance, after I allow them to get in, the band starts singing and the guys start dancing right away, involving my daughters in their dance. Because I have three young daughters my household is in high demand during the *Malanca*. It's mostly the *arnăuți in buttons* who invite the girls to dance. That's how it always happens. In my courtyard, they usually sing three or four songs. But I also reward them with at least 50 lei (\$13). We should all know that a fanfare is very expensive, and its organizer has to get back the money he had invested in the music. Then, there is the food the *arnăut* pays for all the meals offered to the team members, at least four-five times during the entire ritual. You need to slaughter at least one pig to prepare all food for the occasion. But most money go to the musicians that come from neighboring towns and cities. I have even had bands from Zece Prăjini and from Belcești, Iași, Valea Mare. The organizers of the *Malanca* have to bring the best bands available in the area; otherwise, people don't welcome them and the teams cannot cope with the competition either (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

Just like with the *Dance of the Deer* in Heleşteni comună, the *Malanca* team in the villages of Ruginoasa is interested a lot in the money collected from the householders.

Usually they stay for about 5-10 minutes at each house, and the householder pays about 50-100 lei (\$13-26). The least amount one could give is 30 lei (\$8). But only few give that little. More, if the householder is well-off, he may ask for a *badana* dance. This is an individual rhythmic dance performed by a *căldărar* or an *arnăut* on his knees, around his *badana* that lies down on the ground. For this dance, the *căldărar* or *arnăut* receives some extra 10-15 lei (\$2.5-3.5). All in all, a householder can get to pay even 1000 lei for all the teams that visit him during the holidays. There are from 3 to 5 *Malănci* organized in the entire comună (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

Extending the comparison with the Heleşteni rituals, one can notice that the *Malanca* in Ruginoasa has things in common with the courtship elements in the *Dance of the Goat* from the neighboring locality; it thus stands for the same trends and values within a peasant world strictly and rigorously regulated. Maybe this is precisely the reason why some people in

Ruginoasa also call the *Malanca* by the name of *Goat*. And, just as with the *Dance of the Deer* in Heleşteni, I have experienced the ritual towards its final stage, when the strict rules of the peasant family started to be replaced by new ones, only to be able to maintain a disintegrating custom alive. The declarations the people of Ruginoasa have made lead to the same conclusion.

Being an *arnăuț-șef* was a great honour especially in the past. The reason was that organizing a *Malanca* and managing everything well during the ritual was a difficult task. First of all, it involved expenses that not anybody could afford. All the youngsters joining the ritual had their military service accomplished and were interested in getting married. And *Malanca* was like a sort of chance to build a reputation in front of the girls. So the ritual was strongly connected to the idea of marriage and founding a family. In recent times, younger children and even girls acting as *arnăuți* started to organize a *Malancă*. But this happened only after the 1989 Revolution. Before, the young people organizing the *Malanca* would not have allowed this to happen. But now the ritual could disappear if these children would not create teams, too (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).

The slow decline of the *Malanca* goes hand in hand with the tendency to accumulate more profit from performing it, a fact that has become obvious even in the case of the *Dance of the Goat* and the *Deer* in Heleşteni.

For the last couple of years, there's been a competition between the *arnăuți-șefi* for attracting the most skilled dancers that they pay better, too. This is something recent. There was no such thing before. And this happens because an increasing number of young people don't preserve the tradition and don't want to join these customs anymore. That is why it is increasingly difficult to make yourself a team. Let's take my example: I am not among those who don't care about village traditions; even if I won less, I would not want to go work abroad. I want to spend winter holidays every year here in Ruginoasa. I am happy with the salary I have here in the village as a teacher (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

Meanwhile, a kind of atomization of the community is observable, given the fact that some richer householders offer more money to the *Malanca* teams whereas others who cannot compete with these prices, stopped opening their doors when caroling teams approached.

Besides, the increasing violence of the morning confrontation shed a negative light on the whole village world, and this was also reflected in the way *Malanca* was performed.

This *Mummers' Battle* should go on, even if the two teams stop fighting, and just walk around the village in ugly outfits. Now the battle has kind of changed. People have kind of lost their mind. In the past, the New Year used to last three days. I remember that in the past the *Malanca* used to come here in Rediu – a rather isolated village in the *comună* – only on January the 3<sup>rd</sup>. And people would welcome everybody. When I was a teenager, householders would always open their doors and ask: «*Whose are you?*» And we would reply: «*We are the Malanca of Lupu from Rediu or the Goat of Todorescu for instance.*» Now there are many who stopped welcoming the *Malanca* and the *Goat*, too. But the ones welcoming the ritual offer more money than they used to in the past. In the past, more people opened, but less money was given. But in the past one could trust the mummers. Because, after the morning battle, they would stop fooling around. So, even if they quarreled in the morning, then they would walk together with *Malanca* and other rituals in all the villages. It was like an unwritten law. After the morning battle, everyone stopped fighting. But now one cannot trust them anymore. People are much nastier.

Youngsters are more shameless (Dumitru Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

Indeed, the socio-economic changes in recent years had an increasing impact on the performance of these rituals, gradually leading to their isolation. In the past, however, the relation between the *Morning Battle* and other village rituals was much stronger. All these were well observed by the inhabitants of Ruginoasa themselves.

I say that *Malanca* was born at the same time with the morning confrontation. I'm saying this because they are somehow connected. After the battle, there had to be a party, too. For, if we were to regard the morning confrontation as a sort of sports game, it's normal that, after winning, the winner has to be acclaimed, and the victory has to be celebrated with play and music. *Malanca* takes all sorrows out of us. It washes our worries away and breaks burdens into pieces. When I hear the *Malanca* fanfare playing and I see the men dancing, I find myself with tears of happiness in my eyes. I enjoy the moment, I like it. But, after the tough fight on December the 31<sup>st</sup> a few days ago, it looks as if a complete silence covered Ruginoasa, and everyone shut

up, too. Even the masks used for the fight were dropped and nobody used them for the ritual called *Târâitul* (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

*Târâitul* is a ritual that resembles a lot the *Pantomimic Mummies* in Heleşteni. But, unlike the mummies in Heleşteni who visit their friends' households, youngsters in Ruginoasa who join the *Târâit* only visit the houses of the girls they consider fancy or for which team members nourish even more profound feelings. Generally, *Târâitul* is a ritual with a simple morphology; one of the participants described it very clearly in a few sentences:

*Târâitul* takes place on the evening of January the 1<sup>st</sup>, but also on January the 2<sup>nd</sup>, from evening to morning or depending on each one's tether. The aim of this ritual is that men old enough to get married visit the young ladies' houses. four-five lads, usually very best friends, form a group and visit the households where marriageable girls live; they all put on ugly masks. So they don't put on those beautiful helmets that *căldărari* wear for the *Malanca*. In the case of the *Târâit*, the organisation is much less complex than in the *Malanca* and many times the decision is taken on the spot. The same happens for choosing the houses where they go. But they only pay attention to houses where young unmarried girls live. First of all, the group makes noise in front of the window, and then utters a *urare*. Then, when the girl gets out, the mummies put lipstick or flour on her face. They push her around a little and she tries to guess who is behind the mask. If he is nearby, the householder shares the same fate, being teased and hit with knitted scarves, old handbags or rubber hoses. With *Târâitul*, one only visits the girls he knows. As a result, the team does not usually visit more than four-five houses. Wishing (making a *urare*) is necessary because one cannot visit a house only to tease. One also has to make a *urare*, and the householder is then obliged to ask the man to join the family meal, or at least to offer some wine and cookies. No money is given to the *Târâit*, and the main idea is not that of performing it for the money; therefore, a team may well remain even for half an hour at somebody's house, whereas with the *Malanca* the main idea is that of getting the money and moving quickly to the next house, so such a thing as with the *Târâit* would not happen (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

From the interviews I have taken to elder people in the village, the logical sequence of the rituals was supposed to be as follows: *Mummies' Battle*, *Malanca* and *Târâit*. While *Malanca*



displayed youngsters as good organizers which, in the meantime, had sufficient resources to organize such a complex ritual, *Târâitul* presented the strong-spirited young men in the village as true, courageous men who were not afraid of a tough confrontation. Precisely because of this reason, until a few years ago, *Târâitul* had been strongly linked to the *Morning Mummies' Battle*. This was especially because the ones who joined the ritual use the same ugly masks that fighters use in the battle between the two groups. Wearing these masks in front of their sweethearts, the young men proved their maleness. Young lads presented themselves in front of their lovers as real knights who had joined a real battle, and their ugly masks proved the experience. At least that is how things looked like until a few years ago when the fight between mummies became increasingly violent.

Once the *Morning Battle* became a national news subject, it started to look rather like a fight for victory, despite the risks and the costs, thus isolating itself of all the other traditions performed in the comună. This tendency has also been marked by the gradual disappearance of any rules imposed by tradition, also including here its firm connection to the *Malanca* and the *Târâit*. Thus, if in 2009 I was a witness myself of the way elder men from the *valley* trained the youngsters and accompanied them to the place of the fight where they would make sure civilians stayed out of the battle and fallen mummies are not being hit, in 2011 this was not possible any longer. During that confrontation, all older men who tried to interfere were beaten and sometimes had their heads injured by flying stones.

In 2009, few minutes after the battle was over, I had the opportunity to talk to a fighter from the *valley* who, despite having lost the battle, stated: „It was beautiful! This year was the most beautiful one!” The following day, watching the recordings of the battle, I saw that fighter from the *valley* was one of the last ones to run of his opponents. Before, although he had had the chance to hit harshly a fighter from the *deal*, he only hit him once with the club, right in the middle of his head – the spot best protected by the mask, where no serious injury can happen. Afterwards, he threw his club and ran down the *valley*. Well, all these elements disappeared in 2011, and the battle turned into a bloody slaughter with clubs, stones, bricks, fists and feet hitting without mercy; the luckiest ones managed to escape, and the most unfortunate got to the hospital.

Mr. Michi Balcan was able to offer me a very expressive conclusion on the effects of the 2011 battle by comparing it with the way most battles used to be when he was young:

Well, when I was young, there was no event like the one that happened a few days ago [December the 31<sup>st</sup> 2011]. Back then, mummers from the *hill* ran back to their area, we would stay in ours, jumping with joy and excitement and then we would go to the center in nice groups. And let me give you an example. When I was young, uphill there lived a very strong and brave man, an exceptional fighter called Claidei. Right before the battle, he came alone among our people and said: «*I know that my people have no team this year but, if you agree, I dare to fight with any of your men one by one. Or, if you want, I put my mask on next to your team and fight against my people to show them they were not capable of forming a decent team this year.*» Well, nobody had anything against this young man. Nobody touched him and they all admired his courage. So this is what fair play used to be. And fair play also meant nobody would hit the fallen opponents. If I saw anybody from the rival team fallen to the ground, I would not touch him. I would fight with the ones still standing. The one who had fallen was already a victim.

But it's revealing to see what happened after the victims had been sent to the hospital. Today I have found out an information: there are eight people from Ruginoasa at the neuro-surgery department of the hospital in Iași. Four are from the *deal* and four are from the *valley*. They all cry on each other's shoulders and they are sorry for what happened. Their medical condition is quite serious: one had a brain surgery and could not hear anything afterwards, so he had to go through an ear surgery as well. Another one is in a coma and his condition is critical. Another one, civilian, had a bone in his arm broken so bad that they had to add an implant to fix it. Even one of my brothers, also civilian, ran away, but was caught and they broke his head, fractured his arm bone and made his hip black and blue with their clubs. They caught him on a side street when he was heading back home and they crushed him there. His luck was a man called Chiriac (from the *deal*) who interfered between the attackers and my brother. That's how he managed to escape because otherwise they might have killed him. And these are not all the victims; some with head injuries and less serious wounds were hospitalized in Pașcani city, and later the same day they were sent home after basic medical care.

As inhabitant of Ruginoasa, I would not want this ritual to vanish. Because without it we are only half of what we really are. But we will definitely have to ask for support from the security forces so that this custom is done in a civilised way, and especially

without the civilians' intervention; they have nothing to do with this battle.

Authorities have to help us so that mummers could fight decently and not with civilians (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

The battle of 2011 proved that the rules of the rural traditions – already in a process of slow disintegration since communist times – are almost extinct, and that a fight that used to be part of a manifold ritual complex became just a sensational news topic resembling a *Reality TV* where violence and brutality met no other opposition. This fact was excellently underlined by one of my interviewees who made the following remark:

The young lads from the *deal* who fool around also during the year – also menacing the politicians in the opposition, for example – are called *pirates* or *huns*. Generally, these people have little or no education at all. Before, villages would fight each other. Now people from within the same village fight. If you had discovered these *pirates* from the *deal* behind their masks, you would have seen they don't belong to any other band except for the *Morning Battle*. They don't organize anything as such. Additionally, more than half of them are married people who would normally have nothing to do in there. They should be taken by the police right away. Normally, the first ones who should put their masks on are those organizing the *Malănci* and walking with the *Târâitul* (Costică Nechifor, 65 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

Mr. Nechifor's observations are more than eloquent for the situation presented. The slow disintegration of peasant values and principles in Ruginoasa *comună* finally led to insularizing all the rituals within Ruginoasa' villages. While the *Malanca* – just as the *Dance of the Goat* in Heleşteni – became a commodity and an increasingly profitable business, the confrontation between *deleni* and *văleni* in the village of Dumbrăvița became a Reality TV type of sensational news, where the battle's winners were happy to see their faces for a few minutes on local and national television screens. Yet, despite this preliminary conclusion, there were still a number of doubts regarding the participation of the so-called *civilians* and of the elders into the fight in recent years.

Teacher Mihai Lupu tried to give me an explanation based on a comparative approach:

A shortwhile ago, I participated in a conference in Iași dealing with tradition, and I raised a question: «Why would the fight with tomatoes in Buñol in eastern Spain or the crowd's battle with the running bulls in Pamplona in northern Spain be more legitimate than the battle of the mummers in Ruginoasa? Why is this battle always sanctioned by the police and the gendarmes while these customs in Spain turned into huge tourist attractions?» Maybe it's our own fault, too, since, as teachers in the *comună*, we have not get involved enough to explain to all locals the aim and the symbolism of this battle. On the other hand, I understand that the interference of civilians in the battle turned it into a very violent fight. I believe *civilians* are those who generate the most violent acts during the battle. But I know from my own experience that these *civilians'* presence in the battle is a recent phenomenon, appeared after the Revolution. But I simply cannot explain myself the mutation provoked in the mind of the *civilian* locals who began to join the battle more actively and more violently. I still believe it's a mutation produced over time, during many years, and linked to certain social and maybe economic processes affecting the community (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).

The deep observations made by the teacher Mihai Lupu – who has well understood the relation between the economic, political and social changes, and the winter rituals of the people in Ruginoasa – represent the starting point for the analysis in the last section of this chapter.

## **6. Labor Migration, Social Inequalities and Their Relation with Ruginoasa's Battle with Clubs**

Mihai Lupu's observations and my interest on labor migration and the social changes in the rural world within global capitalism led me to some of the most striking revelations I have had regarding the battle in Ruginoasa. In 1969, in the chapter *From Local Folklore/ Din folclorul local* of his monography about Ruginoasa, the historian Boris Crăciun was already remarking the big social and economic transformations of the locality during the first two decades of Communism. Crăciun linked these social changes to the privileged geographic location of the *comună*, between two important towns in the region – Pașcani and Târgul Frumos – and close to communication routes such as the car roads and the railways. All these elements enhanced the migration to urban areas and commuting to jobs in nearby towns. In its turn, labor migration produced important changes in the locals' mentality. Many of them

gave up their furniture, their traditional house decorations and their old activities such as sunflower and hemp oil pressing with the primitive tools extant within the peasant household (Crăciun 1969: 84-85).

The people I talked to and interviewed in Ruginoasa also mentioned the socio-economic changes the settlement went through during Communism and even in Postcommunism. Mr. Mihai Lupu even explained the disappearance of the battle between the mummies' teams in the villages Rediu and Bugioaia through the migration of youngsters from Rediu towards larger urban centers like Iași where they subsequently attended university studies and, later on, many of them settled down. Under these circumstances, those who were left to continue this sort of violent confrontation were „a rather peasant category that had less contact with the city world and more with agriculture, field work and village world (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).”

Mr. Michi Balcan, in his youth nine times a participant in the mummies' battle, also observed this tendency:

Usually, if the men who masked themselves for the battle had a neighbor or friend who was their age and would study and be passionate about books, they would not urge him to join the battle. On the contrary, they would say: *«Leave this one alone for he is delicate, he goes to the university, he's got nothing to do with us here!»* (Michi Balcan, 50 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

These observations were confirmed when I had the chance to talk to a 21 years old student in the Veterinary Medicine Faculty in Iași, from Rediu village. Asked whether or not he would like to join the morning battle of the mummies, he replied me on a very annoyed and convincing tone: “You think I'm a fool to join the battle?!? I have got exams to pass, a lot to study. If a club hits my head, I would no longer be capable of anything. Why would I do that?” (Dănuț Lupu, 21 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

Other young people with university studies from Ruginoasa, such as the sports teacher Cosmin Ungureanu, aged 23, denied even the idea that the battle's winners would nowadays be of more importance for the girls in the comună: “I don't think the young mummies who win the battle are more prestigious for the girls, as some televisions reported many times. This is stupid! A decent girl shall look for a normal young man, not a crazy one like this!” (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

On the other hand, the young men currently involved in the battle state different opinions: “Men who don’t like to fight cannot be considered real men. This is a knight’s tradition! It’s a test of courage” (young participant in the battle, the evening before the battle on December the 31<sup>st</sup> 2011).

It was not only differences in education and social status that had an increasingly important role in selecting those who join the battle and those who do not. The evening before the violent battle of 2011, while chatting with Mr. Michi Balcan in a village bar, I saw a young man entering with his mummer clothes on and the club in his hand. He sat down at a table close to ours, next to some people of his age, and ordered a vodka shot. Watching him with admiration, Mr. Balcan said: “I like this young man. He’s a brave fighter and he fights really well. He’s a bit poor, though. In fact, the poorer men fight better and get involved more into the battle.”

Asked why it is rather the poor ones that join the battle and not the ones positioned on a higher social level, Mr. Mihai Lupu gave me a wise answer:

The poor always had to fight to get something in life, to be someone. I know this from my own experience because I haven’t had a difficult life, but a very difficult one. Therefore, I had to work enormously to become a teacher and to get to where I am now. Whereas someone from a richer family got all these and even more than that much easier (Mihai Lupu, 76 years old, Dumbrăvița village, May 4, 2017, Interview).

Differences in social status became very visible especially after the battle of 2011, when the people of Ruginoasa found out who were the victims and the ones most seriously wounded in the battle:

Three days ago, the most seriously injured was a 17 years old teenager. He’s from the Coțovanu family, a large family with a dad who’s a tractor driver. I even feel pity for these people because they are poor and they don’t even have a medical insurance. I’m thinking of what’s going to happen to this poor guy, injured like that and with no medical cover. Oh dear! (Costică Nechifor, 65 years old, Dumbrăvița village, January 3, 2012, Interview).

The urbanization tendency in Ruginoasa and the loss of traditional customs became very visible in the Communist Era, but continued in postsocialist times, along with the beginning of the massive labor migration wave to western European countries. Among the big changes

brought by capitalism, after the fall of the communist block in 1989, social polarization became more obvious, based on class and social status differences. In this context, a significant segment of the active and more qualified population tried its luck and chances by emigrating to more developed European countries. But, as many of my interviewees noticed, most of those migrating even temporarily for work to western European countries, stopped joining the morning battle:

The young men coming from foreign countries usually don't join the battle anymore. They say the risks are too high and find it meaningless. Usually most of them have a well-paid job in Italy, Belgium or England, and do not want to risk losing their contract for a few crazy moments. They got used to another way of thinking, with respect for work discipline, health and so on. Joining the morning battle would involve the risk of breaking a hand or leg and then losing everything they have there. But I saw many of them coming to record. They bought professional cameras and would rather film than mask themselves (Dumitru Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

During my field research, I have tried to verify myself the relation between migrant workers and their participation in the morning battle. Indeed, I managed to find only a single fighter who has also migrated abroad. He is Ionel, Mr. Michi Balcan's younger brother, and he came back from Italy specially to see the New Year's rituals. His story is fascinating from the perspective of the motivation that made him join the battle, but also for his idealist traditional vision that made him travel 2000 km only to join the fight:

Every year I come from Italy for this tradition. But not everybody is like me. Many who are westernized while working abroad don't come back to fight. However, I'm still sure that 80% of the migrants come to spend their holidays at home. Because in Italy, for instance, you don't find this kind of New Year customs. I work in construction in a town 60 km away from Rome. I arrived yesterday evening, 2000 km done without stopping the car's engine and without any rest at all. I'm going to join the morning battle and then I'm walking with the *Malanca* and *Târâitul*. That's me, I can't be otherwise... This battle is more like a bullfight. But the bull tears you into pieces. But here, even somebody from the opposite team may lend you a hand. But it's somehow close to the bullfight in Spain – a tough yet legal game. The *Mummers' Battle* is a tradition that only the people in the area feel, despite the fact that

everybody watching provides all sorts of philosophical explanations. Even the policemen that belong here know what it is all about and let it be. But outsiders regard it as an act of barbarianism. You should know that there are even women who wouldn't eat a *sarma*<sup>31</sup> in the morning unless they watched the morning battle on December the 31<sup>st</sup> (Ionel Balcan, 32 years old, Dumbrăvița village, December 30, 2011, Interview).

This brief description of the *Mummers' Battle* is relevant for the way an individual with a transnational identity regards the world and life, with he being at the same time a successful migrant to Italy and the peasant grown in a rural culture, within a family strongly attached to the rural traditions and peasant world. Talking about this type of transnational identity and due to its complexity, Michael Kearney compared it to that of global corporations' identity that is hard to understand from the perspective of the binary logic or the *We-The Others* dualist model adopted in the construction of national identities (Kearney 1996:146). This type of identity is not only more complex, but also more difficult to define and analyze because it is more volatile than the ancient peasant identity connected to the village world and agricultural life in a small rural household based on the work done by family members. Analyzing the new global living and production conditions that the individual in agrarian societies experiences, Van der Plough also speaks about a *new peasantry* (Ploeg 2009) while Kearney uses the term *polybians* to describe the multitude of situations, expressions and circumstances where peasants show up in global society (Kearney 1996:147). From this perspective, Ionel Balcan's discourse is revealing, bringing valuable information about the sequences of the ritual of *Mummers' Battle* in Ruginoasa.

Tonight we organize just like a trainer organizes his team before the football match and tells them: you are the striker, you are the midfielder, you are the defender, you do this, you do that. So this evening is even more important than tomorrow morning's battle because tomorrow's result depends on it. We are 25 now in the team. The opposite team had 20-30 members, too. The most important players are those in the first row. Because the ones in the back might not get to fight if the ones ahead fought well or badly.

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<sup>31</sup> *Sarma/Sarmale* [plural] - specific meal for the Mediterranean and Balkan areas. A *sarma* is made up of a cabbage leaf filled with a mixture of rice, pork meat, pork fat, onion, carrots, pepper and dill.



Maybe I shouldn't have come, but I'm too attracted to these rituals. First of all, I left my work aside. I'll lose two weeks of work, as well as the salary I would have got had I stayed there. Besides, there's also all the expenses here that reached almost 3000 Euro. In addition, there were some issues at work and I should've stayed there until they are solved. But I told my boss that I have to go, that there's nothing else I can do. I told him straight: «*You may fire me or shoot me, but for the New Year I go back to my village.*» I have my traditions, my parents and my brothers here in the village, and nobody can stop me from seeing them. My birthday is on December the 19<sup>th</sup>, so I wanted to be home for my birthday. And my father who is 80 now is the one dressing me in the morning when I go to the battle.

I left with these ideas in my mind. I only stopped to add some fuel, I ate a Panini while driving and I drove steadily towards home. I made 2000 km in 17 hours. I drove on with God in my mind. That's what I always say, though I'm not very religious and I haven't attended a church service in seven years. But I've got God in my soul. I'm with Him, He's by me. Maybe others don't believe in God and say He doesn't exist, but I'm not interested in this for I always carry Him inside my heart. I'm here more for this evening and for tomorrow morning. This evening and tomorrow morning are the most important moments I am here for.

Last year, I was here, too. I arrived by plane then, on December the 25<sup>th</sup>. But I caught a very serious cold and had problems with my lungs. I was *căldărar* with the *Malanca*, but I took my pullover and even my t-shirt off at a given moment. Back then I felt nothing, but later I was seriously sick. When I went back to Italy I was hospitalized right away and went through a lung surgery. My left lung had been completely affected and needed a very complicated operation. So right now I'm left with one and a half lung. I was one step away from death. Ever since then, I wasn't allowed to smoke anymore. But, with all the excitement, I started smoking again two weeks before getting back home. Because of these health issues, I shouldn't fight as a mummer anymore, but I cannot live without this battle. This is my blood; I have to respect the tradition. When I left Italy my heart was as big as a fist, now it's like a watermelon because I'm happy to be back home and to be able to join all these traditions. Since my arrival, I've also joined four slaughters of pigs that belonged to my father and my brothers. This is another tradition that fills my soul with joy and I

could not miss it. Preparing the pork, eating a piece of fresh rind together with my family – that’s my pleasure.

Apart from that, I’ve helped everybody here in the village. My car is messed up from the four masks I’ve carried together with four clubs. And during these days, what is there left to say, I must’ve carried around 100 persons in and around the village.

Everybody is amazed that I take them inside my BMW because their clothes are dirty since they come from work... Today I’ve also been to see the folk festival in Pașcani city. I’ve taken my younger brother to this festival and then I came back and brought a few mummers from the village to Pașcani with their masks and costumes. I’ve spent about two hours in the city. But during these two hours, I don’t think two minutes passed by without somebody calling us – I mean strangers in the street who asked us to take pictures with us. We were just like stars from big football teams. The only thing that made the difference was that we didn’t give any autographs (Ionel Balcan, 32 years old, Dumbrăvița village, December 30, 2011, Interview).

Despite my interviewees’ repeated reassurance that both the *Traditional Morning Battle* and the *Malanca* (or other traditions in the locality) have preserved their symbolism and structure unchanged, my impression was totally different. The migrants’ attendance - either as passive viewers or as active participants in the winter rituals of the comună - has had a decisive influence on the relationships and social networks involved in the construction of these customs. Another element added was the globalization of all these traditions, and first of all of the *Mummers’ Battle*, by press mediatization and by the tens of video recordings of the ritual published on YouTube and on newspaper and television websites. In their own turn, all these aspects began to influence the way the traditions were organized, their aim, as well as the way locals approached them.

Under these circumstances, the participants’ selection for the *Mummers’ Battle* became more serious. Those more educated or coming from the richest families in the comună or from the migrants’ category join the tradition less or do not join it at all. On the contrary, those who still live in the comună and work in agriculture, unskilled or low-skilled labor, in Ruginoasa or nearby, join the battle more and more, despite their age or their relation with other rituals in the comună (such as *Malanca* or *Târâitul*). These tendencies led to the increase in violence during the battle and, simultaneously, to a more sophisticated strategy for the battle. In the middle of such a violent battle, the presence of the *civilians*, so

harshly criticized by my interviewees who were attached to the old morphology and symbolism of the battle, has now become necessary. Without mask and costume, but with clubs in their hands, the *civilians* benefit from greater mobility and visibility than mummers, and have the task of covering the sides of the mummers' groups that cannot see the opponents' attempts to surround and to infiltrate from the laterals. The *civilians* also have to push the mummers' group forward, in a sort of rugby scrum where what matters most is not the individuals' skillfulness, strengths and fighting talent, but the size of the group itself and thus its push force.

The talks I had with the fighters themselves reinforced this conclusion. On the evening of December 30<sup>th</sup> 2011, I had the chance to witness the final moment when the masks were sewn, as well as the discussions the evening before the fight. That night, many of the fighters involved in the battle the following day criticized the active participation of civilians in the battle. Nevertheless, the following day, while watching the recordings I had done on the spot, I was surprised to see that exactly those who were critical about the civilians' interference in the battle were actually on the position of civilians defending the sides of the mummers' groups with their long and strong acacia clubs. Put together, these details made me understand that the desire of winning the battle had become stronger than the fighting norms and principles of the peasant tradition. The dissipation of these traditional norms has been a slow process that started in the communist period when the authorities tried to use politically the violence during the battle, and the most violent individuals remarked during it were used to complete the *comună's* collectivisation by responding harshly to any voice that would state a different opinion. Once the young people in the village started migrating to university centers in the region and, following the December 1989 Revolution, as well as Romania's entrance in the European Union in 2007 (when the most active and most skilled labor force migrated to western European countries), these tendencies accelerated along with the social discrepancies between villagers.

My interview with Ionel Balcan - who emigrated to Italy - is relevant in this respect. According to traditional norms, he should not have joined the battle anymore. His age – over 32 – and the fact that he had already been married for many years when the battle took place, were conditions that would have normally disqualified him as active presence within the fighting group. But the nostalgia about his childhood world and the village traditions turned hyperbolical inside his migrant peasant soul, and gave him a transnational identity, always caught between two or more worlds, condemned to travel ceaselessly between them, and left

without the possibility to find himself fully without this permanent move. These facts are representative for most of the migrants from Ruginoasa whom I had the opportunity to talk to. Many of them do not join actively their village traditions, but are incapable of spending holidays in the country they migrated to. A short fragment from my interview with Cosmin Ungureanu is extremely relevant in this case:

There are men who do not find jobs around here, and they leave. They go especially to England, Italy and Belgium. These are mostly the countries they want to get to. I have a friend who went to England and could not come back home for holidays. So I had FaceTime phone conversation with him, so that he could watch live the *Malanca* and all the other rituals, and he was just staying there and crying (Cosmin Ungureanu, 23 years old, April 4, 2017, Interview).

Another fragment from my interview with Dumitru Lupu, social aid office chief in the Ruginoasa *comună* hall, also reinforces the conclusions above. This is his comprehensive outlook on the *comună*'s winter rituals:

If the most active young men in the *comună* went to foreign countries, and the most intelligent went to university, the ones who are still in the village are the ones least prepared intellectually. And these ones knew nothing else except for the *Morning Battle* and maybe the *Malanca*. Because for these two customs, you don't have to learn any lines, whereas with the *Goat* or the *Deer* you have to prepare many consecutive days to perform your part. In the past parents used to get involved into this. They would teach their children the lines. Nowadays they no longer do that because they have less spare time than in the past, and all children would rather be *căldărari* at the *Malanca* because all they have to do there is dance, and this does not involve days of rehearsal (Dumitru Lupu, 57 years old, Rediu village, July 6, 2012, Interview).

## **7. The Impossible Patrimonialization of Ruginoasa's Battle with Clubs**

Another aspect of the *Ruginoasa Mummies' Battle with Clubs* that has not been examined is patrimonialization. While most of the winter rituals analyzed – such as the *Dance of the Goat*, the *Dance of the Deer* and *Malanca* – have undergone patrimonialization attempts by being exported to folklore festivals in various cities in Iași County, nothing similar has ever happened with the *Mummies' Battle*. The leaders and members of

institutions who promote traditional culture in Iași County have rejected *The Battle* firmly and even aggressively, by excluding it from the list of customs that had to be promoted and safeguarded.

This is completely explainable. “Modern images of the peasant have historically been constructed as part of the nation-states with which they have been identified (Kearney 1996:42)”, Michael Kearney stated. So, influenced by Romantic nationalism, Folkloristics preserved only the positive aspect in the mummers’ tradition – the peaceful carol and the wish (*urare*) for a wealthy New Year. This was possible because the *peasant* had been perceived by folklorists in Rousseauian’s manner, as the *noble savage*. In the anthropology practised by western countries with a colonial history, the focus on „peasant” had been successful for a few decades in replacing the representation of the exotic „primitive” of the tribal worlds, as Kearney well demonstrated: “With the disappearance of ‘the primitive’, ‘the peasant’ increasingly came to typify the generalized Other, but an Other seen not as primitive, nor primordial, but as ‘underdeveloped’ ” (Kearney 1996:35).

But the peasant had to be a peaceful *Other* embodying hospitality, amiability, diligence and other such values. Elements like opportunism, aggressiveness, tensions in the rural world, the fragile marital market inextricably linked to the peasant’s attachment to the land, had been taken out of the picture. Therefore, the *Battle of Ruginoasa* has so far been an offence for all the representations the Romanian folkloristics tradition had established. This state was amplified especially because of the huge broadcasting at national level during the last decade. Consequently, a tradition that could have still been ignored by autochthonous folkloristics and even by anthropology, became a sensational national news subject, and the debate surrounding it could not be avoided any longer. Furthermore, the *Mummers’ Battle in Ruginoasa* has opened the discussion about the peasants’ aggressiveness, and shed light on other such rituals in the rural world. For it should be emphasized that the *Mummers’ Battle in Ruginoasa* is not unique in rural Romania. It could be encompassed in the larger sphere of the battles between groups of young men. In my almost two decades of field research at the countryside, I have discovered many such ritual manifestations that express the rural world tensions, being in the meantime a type of passage rites – maturity tests for countryside lads. One such ritual is *Țic*, performed by groups of *momârlani* in the west of the Jiu Valley area; during winter holidays, youngsters dressed in thick sheep fur overcoats hit each other’s shoulders violently until one of the two opponents falls to the ground.

One of the few anthropological works dealing with violence in the world of the Romanian countryside was written by Ruth Benedict, and answer the American Army's demand during World War II. In the section called *Opportunism and Aggression* in Chapter 5 (*Some Romanian Characteristics*), the author dedicates no less than seven pages to describing the Romanian peasant's attitude when faced with violence and aggressiveness, but also the constant use of these two – considered legitimate and regulated through rural proverbs and bywords – in the children's education and in the relation between spouses (Benedict 1943). Although Romanian folklorists were hesitant in describing these facts, the realities were incredibly well captured by many writers who knew the village world in details and described it with incredible honesty. Among them, Ion Creangă, Ioan Slavici, Liviu Rebreanu and Marin Preda – classics of Romanian literature – wrote unforgettable pages about the rural universe, with all its aspects, including violence, tension, hatred and aggressiveness.

Of more relevance for the present study is the fact that violence appears many times even within folk plays like the *Dance of the Deer* and *Dance of the Goat*. This thing could not be ignored even by those folklorists who were dedicated to the principles of the nationalistic folkloristics of Romantic origin. Thus, in his impressive 408 pages long volume dedicated to Romanian folk play<sup>32</sup>, Vasile G. Popa „cannot help” writing a few lines about this problem when speaking about the *Goat and Horses* team in Băișești village, Brăiești comună, situated only 70 km north-west of Ruginoasa:

Many times, the *Goat and Horses* team goes to neighboring villages, too. In the New Year night, they walk in their own village, but the following day until afternoon they wander through the villages nearby. They do not go everywhere, but rather choose to visit acquaintances, friends or unmarried girls. They have to be careful not to be beaten by other teams (Popa 2006:378-379).

I collected a very similar account, but with much more details, from Liviu Apetrei, an inhabitant of Crivești, a village in Strunga comună, neighboring both Heleșteni and Ruginoasa.

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<sup>32</sup> The field work conducted by the folklorist Vasile Popa, together with his pupils from the Fălticeni high school, meant to collect materials for the book *Teatrul Popular Românesc/Romanian Folk Theatre*, took place between 1945 and 1970. So, the facts presented inside the book belong to this period of time, although the author does not mention this explicitly, and 95% of the book consists of reproducing the texts of the *urături* recited by the various folk play teams in the Moldavian villages where the research had been conducted.

In Crivești, the team of *The Deer* is usually formed of 14 *ursari* (bear-leaders), an old woman, an old man, a shepherd, two gypsies, a Jew and the *Deer* dancer. Here, the *comună* hall always issues certificates for the teams that walk around the village in the New Year's night and the following days. This certificate is purposeful because there had been incidents between the *Deer* teams during these days. The police have to have an official situation on the ones who are going to be part of these teams. The certificates also include the itinerary so that, if somebody in the team has his head injured, the place of the accident is traceable. These incidents happen because of the competition between the *Deer* teams and especially when a team in Crivești village goes for instance to neighboring villages like Fărcășești, Gura Văii, Movileni, Cucova or Strunga. I have never been to Oboroceni with my *Deer* team because I was afraid. Large groups of mummers walk around there, and it's kind of dangerous to go there when you come from a different *comună*.

When two *Deer* teams meet, it's customary that the youngsters in the teams – and especially the *ursari* – start wrestling. The strongest stands, and the weakest falls to the ground. This wrestling thing between the *Deer* team members exists especially in the villages of Crivești and Costești. The people in Strunga in particular know this custom we have and, even when they see us from afar, they start running right away. There were instances when it rained during the New Year, and the young lads wrestled in the mud. So afterwards each of them had to go home and change his clothes for they could not enter full of mud into a householder's house. Long ago, we used to wrestle even when the *Deer* team met a *Goat* team. But the *Goat* disappeared in our village about ten years ago, and the only one still standing is the *Deer*. This custom of ours resembles a little the *Mummers' Battle of Ruginoasa*" (Liviu Apetrei, 40 years old, Crivești village, March 18, 2012, Interview).

Regardless of the evidence, the fact that Folkloristics perceived the peasant in an idyllic way made Romanian folklorists ignore the ritual aggressiveness present in the Romanian village world and even exclude the *Battle of Ruginoasa* from the panoply of traditional customs. For this reason, within the patrimonialization attempts decided at county level, decision makers rejected efforts to present the custom onstage in county folklore festivals. Notwithstanding, the teams of *Malanca* from Ruginoasa *comună* that joined these festivals have almost always comprised several fighting mummers with ugly masks and acacia clubs. With the intense mediatization the battle ritual had witnessed, these mummers were always incredibly

successful among city dwellers who would repeatedly ask for group photos whenever they saw them during the festival. My assumption is that all these elements have increased the general confusion regarding the customs in Ruginoasa and led to confusing the *Mummers' Battle* and the *Malanca*. This „furtive” patrimonialization of the battle was probably reflected on recent media accounts of the phenomenon; one of the consequences was the fact that serious confusions have been transmitted this way, distorting the image of a phenomenon deeply rooted in the settlement' history. However, the anthropological analysis I have conducted regarding this ritual, and the social, economic and political relations the actual ritual involves prove its complexity and, above all, its indissoluble connection to the rural universe of the locality.

The basic idea of this subchapter is that the disintegration of the ritualic rules and of the rural set of values is precisely what caused the burst of unprecedented violences in the *Battle of Ruginoasa*, later amplified by the presence of the local and national television cameras. These tendencies have been doubled by the folklorists' ignorance of the ritual, and the rejection of any attempt of patrimonializing it because of ideological reasons that have to do with the way Folkloristics defined itself as science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania. In this heterogeneous and increasingly anomic landscape, the Romanian state had to interfere through its institutions when the rules and values of the rural community in Ruginoasa were no longer functioning or were no longer efficient, while the traditional battle turned into a brutal vendetta that made many victims. Under the influence of global capitalism and the rush to self-achievement it is built upon, the lower-class people in the village of Dumbrăvița, less educated and poorer, transformed the traditional battle into a fight for victory at all costs, in a context where the battle's arena has been de-localized and globalized. Harshly criticized by defenders of village traditions and values, the presence of *civilians* is also an indicator that the mummers' battle has been de-ritualized and has become an aggressive sport rather than a rural custom anchored in the village world and connected to a manifold and coherent ritual complex.

After 2011, when the fighting and the mere possession of acacia clubs during the New Year days was forbidden by a local law, locals experienced strong resentments because they had been used to join or watch the ritual every year. As a sign of protest against the authorities' decision, since 2014 the young men who had fought with clubs in previous years started going out wearing the same costumes and masks, but with corn stalks in their hands instead of clubs. Right under the anthropologist's eyes, the custom transformed from a



violent fight into a ritual contesting state authority, and into an ironic protest against those who interfered for eliminating a custom that everybody in Ruginoasa considered to be part of the village community traditions. With this transformation, the *Mummers' Battle* tradition in Ruginoasa *comună* has not only refused to disappear, but proved that it is still alive, transmitted under a distinct cultural form, specific in its turn to the European mummers' tradition – that of contesting and ridiculizing those authorities that try to control the village world and peasants, together with their principles and values.

Therefore, studying the ritual complex of the mummers in Ruginoasa – including the traditional mummers' battle, too – was an extraordinary opportunity for a field anthropologist, one that may not exist a few years from now. But for the time being, the ritual is still alive and it proves that the *Mummers' Plays* represent ways of responding to social, economic and aesthetic problems within the village community. This does not always involve peaceful feelings, hospitality and harmony; instead, it can engender disagreements, conflicts and animosities. Maybe precisely because of that and regardless of its violence, its gnoseological value for Anthropology is undeniable.

### **C. Conclusions**

In one of his recent works on global capitalism, William I. Robinson paralleled its expansion with the ongoing crisis of humanity. According to Robinson, the global crisis embodies a series of features specific to all major political and economic crises. Among these, several are unique to the current state of global capitalism. One of them refers specifically to the de-ruralization process of the early 21st century.

Capitalism is reaching apparent limits to its extensive expansion. There are no longer any new territories of significance that can be integrated into world capitalism, de-ruralization is now well-advanced, and the commodification of the countryside and of pre- and noncapitalist spaces has intensified (Robinson 2014).

But this expansion, doubled by de-ruralization the American sociologist talks about, should not be seen as a merely political-economic or geographic phenomenon. It also affects the culture and values of those regions where global capitalism expands its dominance. At the same time, global capitalism should not only be perceived as the hegemony of corporate power and monetary policy on all corners of the planet. Commodification may also mean a transformation of local cultural elements into media consumption objects and into a topic of

sterile dispute on the Internet's virtual space, under the influence of television reports; in this case, television, too, is based on consumption, high audience, and economic efficiency.

In this regard, *Ruginoasa's Mummers' Battle* may be approached as an compelling case study, but at the same time as a relevant example of how certain economic, social and political transformations have affected the locality during previous decades. Grafted on a local history of violence, this confrontation may be, together with the rituals of Heleşteni, regarded as a lens through which one could see the great transformations brought along by Romania's modernization started in the interwar period and continued during the communist and postsocialist times.

In his article *Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians*, Lauriston Sharp shows how the introduction of a single artifact – steel axes – in a culture may change all the social relations, social networks, and also the way the people in that culture perceive the world (Sharp 1952). Therefore, it is no wonder that the direct and permanent contact of a rural culture with the modern society may produce radical transformations inside that particular environment. Even more surprising is the fact that, despite the permanent and direct contact with the mainstream society, a rural culture like the one in Ruginoasa *comună* managed to perpetuate a series of traditions to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to keep them alive despite all these influences. The *Battle of Ruginoasa* is perhaps one of the best examples in this respect.

The very beginning of the confrontation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intertwines with the dawn of capitalist emergence, along with the development of capitalist relations in the rural area, and the emergence of great economic and social inequalities. Subsequently, in the communist period, besides the positive aspects related for instance to the spread of school education, including in the rural area, the modernization of Romania involved huge projects of social engineering such as the communist plan of the cooperativization of agriculture, and the transfer of the peasants' private agricultural patrimony into the state's ownership. The Communist state authorities did not hesitate to use coercion and intimidation to achieve goals deemed desirable for state policy. For this purpose, they used those men who were noticed during *Mummers' Battle with Clubs* because of their aggressive behavior, in order to implement the cooperativization of agriculture through violence. Moreover, a careful look at the accentuation of the repressive policy in the Romanian dictatorial state of the Ceaușescu period may find itself a pendant in the escalating

violence of mummers' confrontations in the late 1970s, and in the beginning of the use of acacia clubs during a ritual whose degree of physical violence was milder before.

However, the harshest acts of violence during this confrontation occurred after the fall of communism, and especially after 2004, when certain local and national televisions began broadcasting reports related to this rural ritual. The desire to win at all costs and to get to the spotlight - two of the tendencies encouraged by the capitalist society, a system based on competition and success - were to be seen in *Mummers' Traditional Battle*. In these new conditions, the confrontation - part of the rituals demonstrating manhood, actually existing in other localities and rural areas, too - has become a fierce battle for victory at any cost. The fair play and strict rules of the past have begun to be increasingly replaced by the aggressiveness of the combatants and the involvement of civilians and men beyond their early youth in a ritual initially intended only for young people and only for those dressed in costumes and protected by the thick mummers' masks.

Two of the best known theories of violence helped me analyze and outline the traditional confrontation of the mummers. Galtung's *cultural violence* theory has been a useful tool in understanding a local history where violence has always been used to articulate relations between locals in a rural settlement with a history of conflict and physical violence. At the same time, Whitehead's theory of *violence seen as cultural performance* has guided me understand the violence of the *Mummers' Traditional Battle with Clubs* as part of the local cultural landscape where the influences of mainstream society have played an important role in recent decades. Ruginoasa, a *comună* located on the major road and railways of the Iași County, was more exposed to these external influences than Heleşteni. During the last decade, the transformation of the *Mummers' Battle* also takes into account Robinson's idea of a crisis that is not only economic and politic, but also humanitarian, specific to what humankind has gone through in recent decades. This crisis is also very evident in the traditional societies whose values and principles have been replaced by those of global capitalism. Ruginoasa is a good case study in this regard too.

In spite of these external influences and due to its aggressive stance, the ritual has become impossible to patrimonialize in official ways through state institutions. This was because the violence during the confrontation flagrantly contradicted the Rousseauist image of the peaceful, nice and hospitable peasant imposed by Romanian Folkloristics when trying to construct an archetypal human type from which the Romanian people would have

presumably emerged. However, the ideological disputes over the traditional confrontation of the Ruginoasa masks, consumed in the virtual space of the Internet, on blogs or in comments on YouTube posts, clearly denote the ambivalent image of the peasant in the minds of the Romanians. Thus, if some of the Romanians turned into fervent defenders of the confrontation, it was due to the fact that they perceived *the peasant* as incarnating a series of features such as bravery, fearlessness, and manhood. On the contrary, the most vocal contestants of this custom were in fact those who considered the Romanian *peasant* in the light of the Rousseauist model, incarnating features such as hospitality, humanity, and goodwill.

The complexity of the Ruginoasa's *Traditional Battle with Clubs* demonstrates precisely that the image of the peasant is much more elaborate than the stereotypical images promoted by the Romanian media or Folkloristics. More, mummers' plays include a number of aspects that have been systematically ignored in folklore studies. Among these, one finds aggression, pride, and inclination towards the brutal managing of conflicts between people. The entire ritual complex consisting of the *Mummers' Battle with Clubs*, *Malanca* and *Târâitul* in Ruginoasa demonstrates the antithetic features of the human spirit, from brutality and cruelty to innocence, empathy, and care. The same ritualistic complex shows that the problems of the peasant community in Ruginoasa are not much different from those of the Heleşteni community. In this case, the only difference is the cultural response in front of the same great problems of humans in agricultural societies - their social, economic and existential dilemmas.

Just as in the case of the mummers' plays in Heleşteni, in Ruginoasa's case, too, it is obvious that the ritual complex analyzed is an expression of a cultural micro-ecosystem, but one that has been strongly affected by the influences of mainstream society since decades ago. The same mainstream Romanian society tried to understand the Ruginoasa's *Traditional Battle with Clubs* in terms of its own rules, principles, and values, and it failed, trapped in an ethnocentrism that became much more visible through the Internet, and for the same reason even more pitiful. For the time being, the next chapter is a brief halt on the peasants' system of values.

## CHAPTER IV

### RURAL CUSTOMARY COMMUNITIES<sup>33</sup> AND THEIR SYSTEM OF VALUES

#### A. Introduction

In the previous two chapters I analyzed the mummers' plays in the Heleşteni and Ruginoasa *comune*, placing the locals' voices ahead, next to their way of understanding and approaching these rituals. In this chapter, I am following a path opened by anthropologists who warned of the limits in understanding a culture just by listening to the natives' voice. These anthropologists started from the premise that, one must "read over the shoulders" of those people whose culture one studies and who are the active producers of this culture (Geertz 1972:29). This happens because "what people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things" (Mead 1975). Such an approach is advantageous for this chapter's topic precisely because I am analyzing the system of values of the peasant communities I have studied and understanding mummers' plays in relation to these values<sup>34</sup>.

In order to analyze and explain this complex picture, I explore the theories of two social scientists who had a highly articulated vision in the field of values: Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Hartman. In building his theory on values, the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn provided examples taken from the peasants' rural universe. On the other hand, the philosopher Robert Hartman was the first creator of a formal axiology system, apprehending in the meantime that this could be later applied to more disciplines, including sociology, political science, psychology and anthropology (Hartman 1969).

My starting point for this chapter is the idea that the peasantry's system of values<sup>35</sup> was formed under the influence of two major factors: the relation with the geography, history

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Obrebski is one of the authors who, knowing peasant life well from within, were able to give a comprehensive explanation of what I call customary communities: "In the peasant village community, which is a society of families bound into a whole by a complex network of kinship ties, spreading and developing with the growth of its families, and contracting with the splitting up of the family, the peasant home is anything but his castle. In this society, the life of each family is of public concern to the community at large. Births, deaths, and marriages [and mummers' plays, I would add] are events of public importance and, as a rule, the whole community participates in the ceremonies and festivities of the occasion. There is little privacy in family matters and the family home is not private. It is, of course, a material part of the family organization, a manifestation of its psychical cohesion, a center from which all its activities radiate, and a common family value impregnated with the collective memories of the past and the sentiments of the present" (Obrebski 1976).

<sup>34</sup> Throughout this chapter, I extensively use the concept of *value*. Following the path opened by Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Hartman, I define value as a publicly approved belief in ways of actions and behaviors, based on the definitions people have in their minds.

<sup>35</sup> Both Kluckhohn and Hartman noticed that the values of the individual or of the society are closely linked to one another in a complex system of connections. The way people value and express this by means of assertions

and economy of the peasant communities based on agricultural work - thus implicitly in relation with the "spirit of place" (Ching and Creed 1997); and simultaneously due to peasantry subordinated position with the urban world and the classes situated above it - landowners, boyars or representatives of certain state institutions (Shanin 1971:15). All of these entities were perceived by peasants rather as a cause of their problems than as an origin of possible solutions. This is also the origin point for their suspicions regarding anthropologists as potential representatives of the world outside the familiar and recognizable community space. That is why I use a different methodological approach than in the previous two chapters.

In this context, the questions I start my analysis from are the following: what are the place and role of the mummers' plays within the complex value landscape of the rural communities? Could a deeper understanding of the mummers' plays shed light on the history of the rural communities in various parts of Europe and even outside the continent's borders? Could the mummers' plays be explained by means of a simple equation that would define them as "inverting the order of things" (Kligman 1981:x), as a temporary abolishment of the extant social order and its rules? Or, on the contrary, could we rather regard mummers' plays as an essential part of rural culture and of the system of rural values where their role and place is not marginal but, on the contrary, significant and crucial within the peasants' culture?

## **B. The Devaluation of the Peasants**

In his work *The Traditions of Invention: Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context*, Alex Drace-Francis speaks about the stereotypes and social representations that had marked the evolution of the way land laborers - peasants - were perceived. Of the numerous competing visions that defined the peasant, one proved to be very pervasive. That was the peasants' devaluation due to principles and moral values distinct of those pertaining to land laborers - an attitude known in the field of anthropology as ethnocentrism. Far from being recent in history, negative stereotypes about rural inhabitants go back to ancient times where these were regarded as "barbarian", "uncivilized", "brutal" and "unmannerly", Drace-Francis tells us (2013:11-62).

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and behaviors is not the same with the values they possess, but these values may be deciphered and understood by analyzing their value judgments and assertions. This exercise was also developed by Hartman when he created the so-called *Hartman Value Profile*, an axiological portrayal of individuals that has proved its applicability to psychology, counseling, psychotherapy, employer-employee relations, ethics and religion. Speaking about the peasants' system of values and, above all, trying to decipher these values by analyzing the way a culture's subjects value, I tried, perhaps for the first time in anthropology, to apply the Hartmanian model to a culture understood in an anthropological sense.

George Dalton emphasizes this idea even regarding a more recent period than the one Drace-Francis mentioned: “Peasants were legal, political, social, and economic inferiors in medieval Europe. The structured subordination of peasants to nonpeasants was expressed in many ways, *de jure* and *de facto*, from restraints on their physical movement to sumptuary restrictions on what kinds of weapons, clothing and adornments they could wear and use, and foods they could legally consume” (Dalton 1972).

More recently, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these stereotypes found an excellent vehicle in the works of Marx, the thinker who spread some of the most dominant negative representations about peasants and their organization. A well-known passage about peasants comes from his work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is increased by France’s bad means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science and, therefore, no diversity of development, no variety of talent, and no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption, and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another smallholding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department (Marx 1994).

Marx observes well the isolation of 19<sup>th</sup> century rural communities in France, and the peasants' subsistence economy based on family-work in small-scale farming. These observations are re-confirmed by more recent studies based on systematic archival research (see for example Robb 2008). However, the German thinker rejects the idea that peasants might be endowed with talent, creativity, and especially with the ability to conceive a mode of production that would be more efficient than the small-scale agriculture. Implicitly, peasants are inexperienced in mobilizing and fighting against dominating classes, and at the same time incapable of understanding their role and strength in the confrontation. All this

turns into unforgivable sins of the peasants who are regarded with obvious contempt by the author of the *Capital*.

In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention (Marx 1994 [1852]:62).

This narrow perspective that focuses only on economic and class realities is only partly valid. Marx emphasized the peasants' strong ties with their own community, as well as with their family. In spite of this, he was totally unaware of their extraordinary aesthetic creativity, dense social networks and rich local rituals that made them proud of their own community and their own village.

In one of the few studies that deal with the profound relationship between peasants and their own local communities, Creed and Ching speak about the process of "devaluation of the rustic as a source of identity". The two authors believe that a re-evaluation of rusticity based on a deeper understanding of the rural world could make scholars recognize the value of the rural space and of rusticity as essential elements in the formation of peasant culture (Creed and Ching 1997:vii-viii).

In Romanian mainstream culture, the term *țăran*/ eng. *peasant* often abounds in such negative and pejorative connotations. Exclamations like *Bă, țărane!*/ eng. *You, peasant!* or *Nu fi țăran!*/ eng. *Don't be a peasant!* function as acid remarks about the unmannerly and unrefined behavior of people in certain social contexts.

But what I find more interesting in all this is the fact that, apart from the devaluation of peasants, there is also a parallel devaluation of rituals such as the mummers' plays. This type of attitude goes back in time, too. In Middle Age already, Bishop Faustinus promoted



such a vision against mummers' plays, and this shows us that it used to be an approach common to the clerics of the time.

For what wise man could think that there are people with a sound mind who would want to change [their face/their appearance] to wild beasts/ animals, celebrating the Deer? Some put cattle skins on, others wear animal heads, feasting and bouncing so that, should they turn into such wild animals, they would not seem to be human anymore (Du Cange 1678)<sup>36</sup>.

This kind of attitude towards mummers persisted under different shapes until the present day; during my field research, even I could hear various city dwellers who were watching mummers' teams caroling in the main Romanian cities around the New Year, making remarks such as: "Look how primitive these peasants still are, with their customs. With bear furs on them, they look like people from the Middle Ages!"

A closer look at these processes of devaluation concerning peasants and their rituals proves that neither do they originate in the way peasants organize themselves, nor in their physical work that might sometimes seem quite admirable; instead, these attitudes originate in the peasants' moral values, also identified as the origin of a certain behavior and perspective on the world. "There is probably no other field of enquiry in which the "otherness" of human beings is as difficult to conceptualize as in the field of morals and values" Monica Heintz states in the introduction to *The Anthropology of Moralities* (Heintz 2013).

Usually, those who spread such representations and judgments on peasants knew the life of rural communities superficially. They built their assertions about peasants on a series of prejudices and stereotypes rather than on serious solid knowledge acquired while interacting with the peasants.

However, there is a recurring paradox even in the cases of authors with solid knowledge of peasantry and whose contribution to the development of peasant studies is obvious. Many times, even such authors tried to understand the peasants broadly speaking through a comprehensive exercise, as *Peasants* in general (with capitalized P) and not

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<sup>36</sup> Quis enim sapiens credere poterit inveniri aliquos sanæ mentis, qui Cervulum facientes, in ferarum se velint habitus commutari? Alii vestiuntur pellibus pecudum, alii assumunt capita bestiarum, gaudentes et exultantes, si taliter se in ferinas species transformaverint, ut homines non esse videantur.

through their customary communities - peasants and their customary communities<sup>37</sup>. The titles of the most important works about peasants (*Peasants, Defining Peasants, Reconceptualizing Peasantry*) speak for themselves when it comes to the concerted effort of understanding peasants as a whole, as a human mass, or as a social class, and not as the sum of disparate communities, each with its own history, culture, principles and, above all, its own system of values. Oscar E. Handlin is one of the authors that, in a fragment representative in this respect, expressed this strongly generalizing and uniformizing idea: “A granite-like quality in the ancient ways of life had yielded only slowly to the forces of time. From the westernmost reaches of Europe, in Ireland, to Russia in the east, the peasant masses had maintained an imperturbable sameness (Hadlin 1967:456).”

This huge “mass of peasants” were among the people “to whom history has been denied” (Wolf 1990[1982]:23), Eric Wolf lets us know in one of his most influential books. Peasants were one of the subordinated classes in the hierarchy created by capitalism and the development of market relations. “People without history” is indeed a comprehensive, explanatory and at the same time inspirational concept coined by the great anthropologist. Wolf's great accomplishment is that of being able to explain through anthropological lenses the greatest events of modern history, including intercontinental trade, slavery and the accumulation of wealth. From the beginning of his work, he claimed that his analysis was meant to be not only comprehensive, but also a study of “the reactions of the micro-populations habitually investigated by anthropologists” (E. R. Wolf 1990). Wolf is looking at the history “of the development of material relations, moving simultaneously on the level of the encompassing system and on the micro-level” (Idem 1990 [1982]:23). All these events worked as examples proving his argument that “the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality” (Ibidem 1990 [1982]:3).

In spite of these statements and of his critique against Wallerstein's coarse concept of *world system theory*, Wolf's view is rather holistic than a thorough radiography of the life people in small communities had. While reading his book, it is easy to observe that he sees more often people traveling across localities and continents, involved in international trade, mercantile merchants trying to accumulate wealth from commercial activities, slave and fur

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<sup>37</sup> One notable exception in this respect is Paul Stirling ethnography of a Turkish village, where he describe in ethnographic detail the life and social organization of peasants in a small Turkish rural community (Stirling 1965)

traders. The focus is not that strong on people who spend most of their life inside the borders of their small locality, being more connected to fellow community members than to the macro-processes that are part of the universal history. Focusing on people involved in these large processes, Wolf divides them in two categories: “people who claim history as their own” and “the people to whom history has been denied” or “people without history” (Ibidem 1990 [1982]:23).

Borrowing Wolf’s metaphor, in this chapter I refer to peasants as “people without history” not because they were “the people to whom history has been denied”, but because their lives in their village communities have been little known and studied by “people who claimed history as their own”. From this perspective, I focus on peasants’ community life, together with their rituals and system of values resulting from this type of life. These people were also part of a series of interconnected processes, changes and challenges happening at the micro-level of their small rural localities instead of taking place within the intercontinental movements of populations and goods. Working their small plots of land, using “the pastures and meadows, the waste, the bogs and woodlands that existed for the use of all” (Handlin 1967: 459; Stahl 1998) or being under the domination of landowners and other elites (Scott 1977), these people contributed with their work to all the macro-processes described by Wolf. Yet, their life gravitated mostly inside the narrow borders of their village and the firm rules imposed by their communities’ network and family ties (Stirling 1965).

Especially in the past, when they were not educated at school and remained illiterate, rural people never had the chance to see either the whole picture of the empire, country or continent they were part of, or that chunk of history inside which they were significant through their work and presence. It is true that they fought in certain imperial armies or, later, mainly after 1848, in those of national states, they paid tribute to boyars, landlords and state authorities, and rebelled against those in power when they were too oppressed (Scott 1977). Nevertheless, most of them had been, for a long period of time, more connected with the small world of their village community than with the great narratives of superordinate political entities. For all these people, their village mummings and their local rituals were more important than many great events of the universal history mentioned today in our most common textbooks, from primary school to college.

Unfortunately, even today, few studies try to regard these micro-processes and especially to understand them through the lenses provided by the moral-value horizon of the

village communities' members. Those few anthropologists who studied peasants in different corners of Europe through extensive participant observation ended up talking about the dense social networks inside the village, doubled by the peasants' tendency to demarcate themselves from their neighbors (Stirling 1965). Kazimierz Dobrowolski too, who focused on Polish peasants, described their “institutionalized social gatherings” that were “very important means for the preservation of traditional culture” (Dobrowolski 1958:284). He observed that of special importance were “the neighbors’ meetings, which gathered for certain ceremonial occasions like spinning or tearing feather, as well as for more informal events like regular evening gatherings, especially in the winter months. These gatherings, common in Southern Poland by the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, were the forerunners of the modern book or newspaper” (Dobrowolski 1958:284). This social-economic environment was responsible for the peasant village's strong solidarity and eternal preoccupation for drawing social and cultural borders between “our village” and “their village” (Stirling 1965:29-35).

The two tendencies illustrated above, next to the outsiders' inclination towards devaluing peasants and peasant culture, are traceable in the mummers' plays as they are still extant in areas preserving a vivid and dynamic rural culture. In these areas, one may observe that there are sometimes big differences in the morphology, functions and symbols staged by mummers living in neighboring villages; however, one may also find striking similarities between the mummers' plays situated at extremely remote points in time and space. This is one of the topics and paradoxes that my study tries to explain. In fact, the history of mummers goes hand in hand with the history of peasant communities and, in the meantime, is an expression of the peasant world's system of values. Like an old fresco, this history of mummers tells us about the peasants' devaluation by superordinate classes, about their relations with outsiders, their perception of the world and life, but also about the way their everyday problems and difficulties could be overcome by ritual and aesthetic feelings.

### **C. Mummers and the People Without History**

A couple of times, my life has given me by accident the opportunity to understand how country people imagine their world, and how they define themselves and their rural universe in relation with the larger world. I had one of my first revelations when I was just twenty years old, serving in the army. Situated in southern Romania, my unit was a huge one, comprising more than a thousand soldiers and numerous officers. Nevertheless, by the end of

my stage, in the dorm of my company there were only six soldiers left, the rest of them having been transferred in the meantime to different other units throughout the country. One of those days, just two months before finishing our service, we were announced that in the coming days, the dorm of our company was required to receive more than fifty reservists for two weeks. For these men, aged between 30 and 50, known as "reservists" in the military jargon, that two-weeks training was an obligatory requirement of the Romanian Army.

Indeed, the unit soon became overcrowded with men we called 'elders'; all of them were, as we learned further, peasants from the County of Dolj where our unit was located. By talking to them, I soon realized that most of the people who lived in that backward region had a low educational background, with barely five or six primary school classes attended. After a few days, when we got to know each other better during the evenings when there was nothing else to do - as the room did not even have TV or radio -, we used to gather in front of a huge two square meters' physical map of Romania and to take a look at different areas on it. As most of these reservists had not traveled too much in their life, they started to ask me few questions about various areas and localities, and I would provide quite a lot of details as I had been fond of geography and history since childhood. Impressed by my geography knowledge, the reservists I was talking to told their comrades that I knew where each locality on the Romanian map was located. The same evening, I got involved involuntarily in a kind of game where more and more reservists came in the front of the map to try their luck with me, hoping they would find a small locality that I would not be able to trace on the map. This guessing game was easy for me to win. Their literacy was so poor that they had to stare at the map for a minute before being able to read and pronounce the name of that locality. Thus, by usually scanning the area of the map the person was staring at, I could easily find that locality and present myself as a winner once again. Every time I won, the person who lost expressed loudly their astonishment with brief statements like "Oh Hell!" together with his fellow reservists. They were amazed at how good my geography knowledge was, and at the same time felt frustrated for losing each time.

After playing this game more than two dozen times, they all started to look at me as if I were a geography guru, a sort of living miracle. That moment, a man in his mid-40s who had seen my performance from beginning to end, said that he would also like to try his luck with me. Without even looking at the map, he told me the name of a locality. I realized I was about to lose the game, but I asked him to give me five minutes. During those five minutes, knowing that the reservists came only from the county of Dolj, I start scanning from north to

south all the localities of the county, hoping that I could finally find that village. When I was sure I had read almost all the localities of Dolj, I asked him to give me the name of a larger locality close to that one, so that I could find it easier. The rest of the reservists involved in the game were already jubilating for I was about to lose the game, and so the miracle behind my knowledge started to crumble. However, when the guy gave me the name of a bigger locality in the proximity of that village, I realized immediately how close it was to our military unit. So I started screening again, more intensely, all the localities around that bigger locality he had given me as a clue, and I declared with strong conviction that the particular locality he had named was not on the map.

My statement created a lot of confusion among peasants-reservists: “How could a locality exist and still not be on the map, especially on such a large map?”, they wondered. The result of the game, as well as whether I was losing or winning became secondary, and their main concern was to find out if that locality really existed or was maybe just an invention of their fellow reservist. I faced the same dilemma, too. So I asked him to look with me at the map and give me more details about that locality and its neighborhood, in the hope that perhaps we could find it together. He accepted immediately, as he himself had also become curious to find the location of that village. Thus, together with him, I was able to identify exactly the place he was talking about, but we all observed that there was no name written down. “How do we know this place really exists?”, a fellow reservist asked that moment. “Because I was born and I've been living there for thirty years!”, the man declared with a strong conviction in his voice.

After that event, I became friend of that man and he started telling me stories about his small village, actually a hamlet with just 20 houses. This was how I learned a lot of interesting and fascinating life stories that had happened in the small, insignificant locality that was not even mentioned on the map. Some of the most impressive stories he narrated with a lot of talent were about the mummers called *Călușarii*, their *dansuri îndrăcite/crazy dances* and *vindecări miraculoase/amazing healings* during the Whitsuntide day. These stories surprised me a lot particularly because I had heard about *Călușarii* only from the official radio and TV channels, and from propaganda newspapers during communist times; so I had the impression they are nothing else than a strenuous masculine folk dance. Nevertheless, as a young man, the stories that peasant told about the miraculous powers of

*Călușari*, together with their magic forces and esoteric rules mesmerized me and impressed my imagination greatly<sup>38</sup>.

Another similar story in my life happened almost twenty years after that event. This time I had already been for a few years in the United States of America where I started my Ph.D. in Anthropology. Like many other graduate students, I needed some extra money to pay for all my expenses. This was how I started working in a restaurant. At the restaurant, I soon became a good friend of the chef, a Mexican guy called Cevo who had immigrated to the United States from a small locality close to Puebla City. Besides the fact that he enjoyed teasing me all the time, calling me by the nickname “The Russian Spy”, I knew that, in fact, he admired me a lot. I knew he was impressed that I had much more education than anybody in his circle of friends. Besides “The Russian Spy” he also called me “The Doctor”, especially when he introduced me to his friends.

Actually, Cevo was a curious and intelligent guy who loved to hear me telling stories of my country. Sometimes, he would also tell me stories about his own childhood and his family, and I enjoyed that, too. I was mostly impressed by the adventurous story of his migration when his father, one of his sisters and Cevo had crossed the border illegally when he was just eleven years old, and came to work in Massachusetts. For this reason, since the age of thirteen, Cevo had ceased going to school and instead had started working in a bakery and afterwards in a pizzeria.

During a dull afternoon when the restaurant where we worked was not busy, Cevo began to talk about the Mexican Revolution. Soon after he started the story, I realized his knowledge on the topic was vague and imprecise, a combination of what he saw in movies and what he heard in some kind of street discussion. Knowing few things about this topic, but much more than Cevo expected, I interrupted him many times to complete the narration with more details. At a certain point, pretending to be very annoyed, Cevo bursted: “What the heck Doctor? How do you know about Emiliano Zapata and about Pancho Villa?” Half astonished, half irritated, Cevo exclaimed: “Doctor, you know what? I will tell you a name from the Mexican history that you have never heard about!” “Go ahead!” I said, being curious to play his game and to see what character from Mexican history he would reveal with his ‘gotcha question’. Then he exclaimed triumphantly: “Miguel Camaney!” When I heard the name, I

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<sup>38</sup> For a more complex view on *Călușari* custom see Gail Kligman, *Căluș, Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual* (1981)

scratched my head a couple of times and I had to declare, much to Cevo's delight, that I had no clue about who that character was. I also told him I was really curious to find who he was. That moment, satisfied with his victory, Cevo exclaimed: "This is the man who sells avocados on my street!" His statement could not astonish me more. I realized immediately that it did not matter how much history somebody tried to learn in school, that history would be tributary to certain big narratives that would always leave many people and places aside. That moment I remembered instantly the story with the reservist that had happened almost twenty years before, back when I was in the army. At the same time, I connected that story with the nostalgic memories that Cevo had told to me during the previous weeks about the Mexican mummers and their carnivals at the beginning of March that take place every year in Puebla City and the neighboring localities.

However, the moral of both stories became more relevant for me in the light of my new research on peasant mummers' plays. Today, there are still people in the world - and there were probably much more in the past - for whom the big narratives of the accepted version of world history, as well as the geographic borders of their countries had less importance than the events happening in their own village. This was because most of their life had been spent inside the narrow borders of the village. In the field research I conducted as rural anthropologist since 2000 in the countryside of Romania, Moldova Republic and Ukraine, I still had the chance to find elders who had not travelled in their entire lifetime more than 40-50 kilometers away from their own village, only to the closest town or city in the neighborhood. Even there, they had the chance to travel just several times in their entire life. All these people were connected to their own locality with all the particles of their being. For all of them, local mummers meant much more than the official version of world history or the big narratives students learn at school. Now, most of these people are elders and represent a minority of the countryside population.

Today, the countryside is populated mainly by a new peasantry (Plough 2013), a peasantry emigrating and living for a long part of its life in foreign countries and places (Kearney 2006:15-21). Both the reservist from the army and Cevo are now part of this new peasantry, being migrants who found a new way of life in the cities, far from their own village, or in a foreign more developed country. But these are the people who, just a century ago, used to form the majority of the world population (Hobsbawm 1996:289). And these are the people whom I called, borrowing one of Wolf's concepts, *people without history*.



#### **D. Mummers in the Literature**

Anthropology, sociology and history studies have extensively analyzed peasantry, and have made interesting observations about its economic, political and social life; however, they have almost completely ignored the moral value horizon of peasants. This ethnocentric orientation of a considerable part of rural studies was observed by Pamela Leonard and Deema Kanef in their work about the postsocialist peasant:

Viewed from a culturalist standpoint, political economy tends to reduce cultural content to a function of utilitarian desire for material gain. Whether located at the collective level (for example Scott 1976) or the individual level (Popkin 1979), political economic approaches have focused on the common concern with economic rationality, attributing to peasant mentality a universal logic and transparency. A culturalist critique of political economy has been articulated in the work of Michael Taussing (1980), who highlights the way in which such a theoretical concern with utility is ethnocentric and reproduces the logic and culture of the theorist, rather than savoring the meaningful content of the people under study (Kaneff and Leonard 2001).

This can also be a reason mummers' plays together with their dynamic relation and multiple connections to various rural communities, have never been the topic of case studies in anthropology or other humanities. Despite the fact that this was how anthropology and sociology positioned themselves, great writers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20th century adopted a different standpoint. These writers wrote memorable pages about the peasants' perception of the world, and also about their customs inside the small rural communities. More, some of the writers understood the important role folk theatre played in the cultural, aesthetic, social and economic life of the village community universe.

It was usually the writers born in the village and who had spent their childhood in the countryside - and thus knew well the realities of the peasant world - who wrote memorable pages about mummers. One of them, a Nobel laureate for literature, the Polish writer Władysław Reymont, opens a window towards the complex world of the mummers and their strong connection with peasant customary communities, in his best-known and most substantial four volumes work, *The Peasants* (Reymont 1925):

«Have they been here, with the 'bear?」 Roch asked, to change the subject.

«They are at the organist's now, and will be here at once.»

«Who are the performers?»

«Why, the sons of Gulbas and Filipka; who but they, the rogues!»

«Here they come!» the lasses cried. In front of the cabin, a long-drawn roar resounded; then various animals' cries: cocks crowing, sheep bleating, horses whinnying: all this to the accompaniment of a fife. Finally, the door opened, and a young fellow came in, clad in a sheepskin coat, turned inside out, and a tall fur cap, with his face so blackened, he looked like a gipsy. He came pulling the 'bear' in question after him by a rope, covered all over with shaggy brown pea-straw, save for a head of fur with paper ears that he could shake at will, and a tongue that hung out for more than a foot. To his arms were fastened staves with pea-straw twisted round them, so that he seemed to go on all fours. After him went the other bear-leader, wielding a straw lash in one hand, and in the other a club that bristled all over with sharp pegs, to which bits of fat bacon, loaves and bulky packets were stuck. In the rear walked Michael, the organist's boy, playing the fife, and a number of youngsters with sticks, tapping on the floor and shouting vociferously.

The custom described by the Polish writer is called *The Bear* or the *Dance of the Bear*. Along with the *Dance of the Goat*, this is one of the most widespread winter rituals in the mummies' plays category across the entire Europe. In the screening of Reymont's novel by film director Jan Rybkowski<sup>39</sup>, the scene of the Bear team's visit is one of the most exciting scenes in the movie. It is even more spirited than the scene described by Reymont in his novel, the visitis being presented as a tolerated indecency, accompanied by a shameless goosing of all women in the household by the members of the *Bear* team. All this happens in a rural universe marked by the strict rules of tradition regarding the issue of eroticism and intimate relationships. This episode demonstrates once again the freedom and permissiveness granted by the peasants to the mummies during the ritual period, but not allowed at other times of the year and under other circumstances. Thus, the scene of this ritual, in both novel and movie, is in line with the central topic of the novel, that of Jagna, a young woman who loves erotic pleasures and romantic adventures, and gets harshly punished by the village community promoting a rigorous and very restrictive morality in this respect. In the area of Moldavia, the

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<sup>39</sup> Film director Jan Rybkowski himself was a good connoisseur of rural life, too, and his movie *Chłopi* (*The Peasants*), based on Władysław Reymont's novel with the same name, represents one of his top creations and also a landmark of Polish cinematography.

*Dance of the Bear* still exists in various villages, and I analyzed it in my present research, with a focus on the *Bear* in the village of Bădeni, Sticlăria *comună*.

The bear-leader “praised God,” crowed, bleated, neighed like a rampant stallion, and, lifting up his voice, spoke thus:

«We, bear-leaders, come from a foreign clime, beyond the ocean and the endless forests, where men walk upside down, use sausages for palings, and fire to cool themselves; where pots are set to boil in the sun, and where the sky rains vodka: thence have we brought this savage bear! It has been told us that there are in this village wealthy husbandmen, good-natured housewives—and fair maidens too. And therefore from that foreign clime have we come, beyond the Danube, to obtain kind treatment, have our needs supplied, and something given us for our pains!—Amen.»

As Reymont shows, sometimes the *Dance of the Bear* appears accompanied by a *urătură*/carol that differs from region to region. Most of the time, this *urătură*/carol includes elements that highlight the moral flaws and weaknesses of the visited households, with clear allusions to events that had happened in the village community throughout the year. Currently, the *Dance of the Bear* disappeared in Heleşteni village. However, the ritual's attribute of revealing deeds and character traits considered immoral by the village community, appears in the *urături*/carols of *Pantomimic Mummies*, a Heleşteni's custom that contains the most numerous improvisation notes. Reymont's description of this custom in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish village supports the hypothesis that when the village communities were vivid and full of life, mummies' plays were also rich in improvisations, having a close connection to the social relationships within the village community.

«Show, then, what ye can do,» said Klemba; «peradventure there may be something for you in the larder.»

«Instantly.—Ho, play the fife there; and you, bear, dance!» the bear-leader cried.

Then the fife poured forth one of its sweetest tunes, and the lads tapped the floor with their sticks, and shouted loudly in cadence, while the leader mimicked the voices of many a beast, and the ‘bear’ jumped about as on all fours, twitching his ears, putting his tongue out and in again, and running after the girls. The bear-leader seemed to be pulling him back, and struck with his lash at everyone within his reach, crying.

A common feature of the *Bear play* is the dance of the trained *bear*. It consists of a *strenuous* dance performed by the *animal* at the orders of his master, usually a character disguised as a Gypsy. As we have seen in previous chapters, the Gypsy character appears in the *Dance of the Deer* and sometimes in the *Dance of the Goat*, too. For the rural world, the Gypsy is the animal trainer by excellence, and perhaps because of this skill, he is also a character surrounded by a magic aura. Perhaps that is why, even in the case of the Dance of the *Deer* in Heleşteni, the most numerous characters in the team of the Deer and at the same time those appointed to guard the deer, bear the name of *ursari/ bear-leaders*. In late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, when Władysław Reymont wrote his novel, Gypsy artists still wandered through the village and town fairs with trained bears dancing to the sound of the pipe. There is a hypothesis that the Dance of the Bear peasants perform was inspired by those Romani traveling artists.

«Have found no husband yet, lass?—A rope's end you shall get, lass!»

The noise in the room, with the racket and scampering and squealing, waxed louder and louder; and the merriment grew to its height, when the bear began to frolic wildly, rolling on the floor, roaring, leaping for fun, and catching at the girls with his long wooden arms, making them dance to the tunes played on Michael's fife: the two bear-leaders, meanwhile, and the lads who accompanied them, making such an uproar that the old cabin might well have fallen to pieces with the horse-play and the din and fun of it.

Just like in many other mummers' plays, the theme of the marriage, and the alludes to girls who may remain unmarried is also highlighted in this fragment. From this point of view, the mummers' plays are a method of the village community to persuade young girls to start a family from the age of early youth, before getting 24 years old. In the incantations of the deer gathered from Heleşteni *comună* and the neighboring localities, the irony against the girls becoming too old for marriage, gets sarcastic accents. The same fact is highlighted with talent in the novel of the Polish writer.

Then, Klemba's wife having treated them very bountifully, they left the place; but far along the road came the sound of shouting men and barking dogs.

«Who played the bear?» Sohova asked, when they had quieted down.

«Could ye not find out? Why, Yasyek Topsy-turvy.»

«How could I know him, with that shaggy head of fur?»

«My dear,» Kobusova observed, «for such games as that, the doodle has quite enough sense.»

«Yasyek is not such a fool as ye make him out to be!» said Nastka, taking his part. No one contradicted her; but sly significant smiles flickered on many faces. They again sat down and began chattering merrily” (Reymont 1925: 195-197).

The discussions between householders on the mummers' performance and on the villagers who interpreted it are also an expression of village social life and rural values. In my field research, both in Heleşteni and in Ruginoasa, I witnessed discussions similar to those described by Reymont.

In his realistic novel – *The Morometes*, another writer famous for his work on peasantry, too, the Romanian Marin Preda describes the life of a peasant family living in the Wallachian Plain (Preda 1957a). Inside the novel, he depicts an entire episode on *Căluşarii*, a mummers' play already well-known in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century English folklorists with interest in folk plays (Chambers 1933).

«Tita, where are you? Come along, the căluşari are just passing!»

In the quietude of the village the music of the gipsy band could be heard, even nearer. Bircă, Nilă and Tita pricked their ears. Suddenly, the hoarse shout of ‘the mute’ was heard, followed by the shrill shrieks of the women and girls.

«Abreaaaau!...»

Tita got up, Nilă wanted to do the same, but looked at his friend:

«Shall we go and have a look at the căluşarii?»

«To hell with them! We shall see them later on anyhow... Go and dress, and we shall look them up later!» answered Bircă.

«Come on, Tita! Well, if you won't go just send Ilinca,» said Nilă angrily.

Tita left, but Ilinca didn't turn up. The căluşari had stopped somewhere nearby, and the merry shrieks of terror of the women and girls never stopped.

Just like the *Pantomimic Mummers* in Heleşteni, the *Căluşari* sometimes harass those people who seem to be weaker and less prepared to defend themselves. Through such acts, the mummers work as a “vaccine” for those who may have “low immunity” against possible unexpected life events. As I have shown in the discussion at the end of chapter two, mummers may be unpredictable, just like the events of human life in general. That is why

they could be considered an antidote to fears, uncertainties, hesitations, and to other feelings that could turn humans into victims of the life's vicissitudes.

«Come on, let's go up to the road, to see where they're dancing!» Nilă said impatiently.

They got up. Ilinca came running up to tell them that she couldn't call Polina, because the *călușari* had stopped in front of her house, and Polina was inside, dressing.

«Let's go there!» Birică decided.

Bălosu's whole yard was full of villagers. There was no more room, so they crowded on the porch and in the garden at the back of the Morometes' cottage. The children perched on top of the fences, stared at the mute, ready to shriek and run away. Bălosu had opened the gate leading to the road, and though the house and yard were crammed, a dense crowd of people was still outside in the road.

Birică and Nilă edged their way through the garden to get nearer to the show. Birică told Ilinca to sit up in the porch, and when Polina came out told her to come to the mulberry-tree at the back of the garden, after the dance. But he tried to get nearer to the *călușari* to see Polina when she came out. He was lucky, for the 'mute' rushed into the crowd howling lustily, and hitting out with his red sword to make room for the *călușari*. He stood the ebb of the crowd, and elbowed his way forward, without minding the blows of the frantic 'mute'.

Marin Preda's description of the *Călușari* play, and its parallel to a love story that does not conform to the rules and values of rural tradition, does not seem to be random. Like in the case of love stories, the mummers' plays represent moments when the peasant perceives the limits of his own world and the relativity of his own system of values, and faces the necessity of finding a temporary response to the possible challenges against these. That is why the unfolding of a love story episode that tends to threaten the fragile social balance of a rural community, during a mummers' play episode, acquires a special significance. Human feelings may sometimes be just like the mummers' plays - an unstoppable torrent that does not seem to take into account the system of values and the firm rules of the rural world.

The famous dance was just starting, and the *călușari* called one another together: hupp! hupp! hupp! They lined up in the middle of the yard, facing Bălosu's verandah and waited for the leader to give the signal. Tudor Bălosu with his wife and with Victor had come out onto the verandah. Victor stood there dressed in a grey suit with

red-striped tie to his yellow silk shirt, bareheaded, his hair carefully plastered. He looked rather pale, but was smartly attired and carried himself erectly. Tudor Bălosu and his wife had also put on their Sunday clothes. Tudor was wearing a black waistcoat over his wide-sleeved white shirt, and Aristița a blue velvet dress. They were both sitting on chairs, Victor standing between them. Not many of the villagers were wealthy enough to receive the căluș-dancers, and the way Victor was standing there stiffly, looking down at the crowd, showed that Bălosu's were people of mark.

«Hallo there, you chief of the călușari!» he shouted, and when the latter came up to Victor, he told him: «Dance the whole căluș-dance!» a thing that pleased all the assistance, because it was only in the courtyard of Aristide and of a small number of villagers that this rare dance could be fully performed. Aristița Bălosu looked a little more reserved and less haughty, and she kept glancing from time to time at the lobby whence Polina was due to come out.

As I will show in this chapter, *Mummers' plays* have an interesting relationship with the social inequalities in the rural universe. On the one hand, those with a higher social status in the village are not among those performing the plays; instead, they have the privilege of receiving the mummers' teams for a sum of money, thus demonstrating their status as good householders and owners of a surplus that could be given to the artists. Moreover, as we have seen in chapter two, in some cases the mummers have their own methods of abolishing temporarily - at least during the practice of these rituals - the social inequalities in the village.

«Hey 'mute'!» the chief of the *călușari* called out to the mime. «I say Abreau, come right here!»

Abreau, 'the mute' came nearer, pot in his hand, and stopped in front of the lined-up călușari.

He was neither dumb, nor was his name Abreau; he was Costică Guigudel, and his role of a dumb mute in the căluș-dance also entailed the task of theatrical producer or stage-manager. During the dance he was meant to strike fearful blows with his sword at the călușari who were slack or danced badly, but the călușari had taken an oath not to be angry and not to hit back, but only to stave off the blows with their finely carved staffs to which small bells were attached. The căluș-dance lasted for three whole days, at Whitsuntide, and utterly exhausted the călușari's strength, because the more intense and vehement its rhythm, the more beautiful the dance.

When he scared the women and children throwing rotten eggs at them, the ‘mute’ growled like a bear or bellowed like a bull: Aabreau! He wore a dirty, ragged skirt concealing a wooden phallus. His hands and his face were stained with red paint, and he was really a terrifying sight.

Just like the winter mummers' rituals, the display of erotic-sexual objects like phalluses is one of the characteristics of the *Mummers' plays*, including the *Călușari*. Folkloristics considered them to be symbols of nature's rebirth and cornucopia. However, they mostly act as elements used for intimidating young girls and, in general, all those members of the community who have a minimal or no sexual life. During my field research in the area of Iași County, I noticed the display of such phalluses by both the Pantomimic Mummers of Heleşteni and the members of the *Deer* team in the village of Cucuteni.

Abreau hastened to make the so-called counting-up, passing from one călușar to the other, muttering God knows what, when he came upon one whom he knew to be less efficient. He drew back and shouted at them in a commanding voice:

«Hupp-shah!»

«Hupp-shah!» answered the chief of the călușari who then turned away from the ‘mute’ and stepped out to the rhythm of the music, walking round in a circle, followed by the dancers. They all had long red robes on, with bells on their legs, staffs and fez, and red waist-bands.

They were peasants from the village, but nobody could recognize them; so handsome did they look in that costume of theirs.

Their dance delighted the villagers exceedingly; it was the only dance that rigorously conformed to the ancient rules: it could only be danced in a set formation, in motley-colored costumes, with a ‘mute’ and with that which was particularly difficult to find and keep: an untiring leader, a better dancer than all the other who should know the full ritual of the căluș, remembering the number and order of every dance-figure and steps.

In Preda's view, for the villagers, the *Călușari* represent one of the few funny moments and opportunities of delight in their life, within a universe dominated by strenuous physical work, burdensome daily worries, and the difficulties that derive from a mode of production such as the subsistence agriculture.



With the fourth measure, the chief turned his face toward the dancers and called out: hupp-shah! and the others, in the following measure, answered in the same way. But the chief's call took on ever more a tone of entreaty, and at the same time of command, until he suddenly turned round facing the dancers, raised his staff above his head, and shouted harshly:

«Hupp-shah!»

«Hupp-shah!» answered the dancers who now began to dance the căluș in earnest, their chief dancing in front of them, stepping backwards and continually shouting – to the exciting rhythm of music – the same call.

«Abreaaaau!» yelled the 'mute' rushing with his sword at the crowd which at his sight shrunk back hastily with wild shouts of merriment and terror.

'The mute' took out the wooden phallus, and muttering beast-like sounds, chased round the circle formed by the călușari scattering milk and eggs upon it.

Just like the *Dance of the Deer*, the *Dance of the Goat* or the *Malanca*, the members of the *Călușari* team are subject to strict rules respected by all the participants in the rituals. Thus, the team itself becomes a kind of brotherhood where the *mute* in the case of *Călușari*, the *arnăut* in the case of *Malanca* and the *comoraș* in the case of *The Dance of the Deer* watch carefully so that none of the team members behaves in a way that might lead to an event that could break up the entire group.

Without looking at the verandah, Birică felt that Polina had come out of her room, and he turned his head in that direction, fighting against those who were crowding around him. He saw Ilinca approaching.

Polina was standing behind her mother, with crossed arms. As soon as he saw her, Birică forgot everything for a moment, and his bitter feelings melted within him as if they had never existed.

She was looking cheerful and quiet, and when Moromete's daughter Ilinca came close to her and whispered into her ear, Polina nodded that she had understood and continued to be cheerful, whilst watching the *călușari*" (Preda 1957b).

Wolf, Shanin, Redfield and other classical authors of peasant studies neither credited country people as being capable of deep feelings of love, nor did they see any place for Romantic relationships in the rural universe. Peasants were depicted rather as economic agents interested in keeping the household at a level that allowed them to perpetuate their economic

model, doubled by the tendency to obtain the *caloric minima* necessarily for their survival (Wolf 1966:4). On the contrary, writer Marin Preda presents a much more complex peasant universe where people are eager to fight for their love, and sometimes confront the harsh principles of an intolerant community directed against all those who could possibly violate them.

Reymont and Preda described mummers in their relation to the village social life and also to peasant values. This is a vivid universe with tough rules where the life of the individual is strictly regulated by the principles and norms of village community. Within this universe, mummers represented a kind of valve through which the pressure of a strict and vigilant community was temporarily released, and the villagers had the chance to watch and participate in a kind of folk theatre where both actors and spectators were engaged in a dynamic and interactive play. With a great deal of talent, Reymont and Preda's descriptions of mummers highlight a set of attributes that theatrical performances hold: they include absurd elements and dialogues hard to understand by an outsider, but completely meaningful to villagers; they include at least a few masked characters; they intermedate the relations between youngsters within their strict peasant communities; they are an important part of the peasant universe of social relations and networks. Above all these, they are an eloquent expression of peasants' values, moral principles and rules, and can be used as lenses enhancing the understanding of social relations, networks and social inequalities in small village communities.

## **E. Village Communities and Their System of Values - A Theoretical Approach**

### **1. Clyde Kluckhohn and Robert Hartman's Theories on Values and Their Applicability when Studying Peasants System of Values**

Since 2013, the TV show *Starea Nației/ eng. The Nation's Situation* has become one of the most viewed and best ranked late night shows in Romania. Presented as a pamphlet, the show criticizes the politicians' bad habits, their decisions and usually the stupidity, corruption and vanity they displayed on the postsocialist political stage of Romania. But, the final sequences of the show also expose humble people, ordinary citizens of Romania. The field reporter takes trips to various Romanian villages and, after stopping peasants in the middle of the street, he ask them simple questions such as: the meaning of the Romanian national day, the country's neighbors, the name of the planet we live on, the right way to use a

credit card or the answer to a basic arithmetic problem. The recorded answers range from comic to hilarious and sometimes even grotesque.

As an anthropologist watching this show, I could not hide my wonder and disappointment with the ridiculous and sometimes embarrassing situations the field reporter generated with his questions. Besides the shock I experienced every time, I saw peasants feeling lost, tormented and disturbed in front of the camera. These short videos confirmed me once again the strong relationships between peasants and their own rural universe compared to their feeble connections to great political, economic and social events in the country they lived in. I reached this conclusion especially because the peasants I met and interviewed could knowingly speak for hours about everything connected to their village and community, as well as the values these two entities embodied. By approaching these subjects, apart from the priceless information they revealed to me during interviews, my interlocutors would become proud of their village, their region and their way of conceiving their social world and moral universe.

However, rather than in the interviews I have conducted, all these things became more apparent when I had the chance to hear peasants gossiping. These repeated observations made within the peasant culture environment made me remember a statement made by Kluckhohn: “Where the gossip is most current is where that culture is most heavily laden with values. The discussability of values is one of their most essential properties, though the discussion may be oblique or disguised – not labeled as a consideration of values” (Kluckhohn 1951:404). This simple observation I remembered when conducting field research made me understand that the analysis of peasants’ values could be an important direction strongly intertwined with my study of mummies. This is how I started looking from the anthropological/philosophical theories on values to the way values are expressed by people’s behaviors, attitudes, statements and actions in the rural communities analyzed.

I have focused my attention on Clyde Kluckhohn<sup>40</sup>’s theory of “value and value-orientation in the theory of action” (Kluckhohn) and Robert S. Hartman’s formal axiology referring to “the structure of value” (Hartman 1969).

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<sup>40</sup> Kluckhohn’s research on values is, according to David Graeber, “the first great effort to come up with an anthropological theory of value” (Graeber, 2001:5), but unfortunately “ran most definitively aground” (Graeber, 2001:5) mostly because in the 1960s the science of anthropology went in two opposite directions: one looking at economics, another one looking at linguistics (Graeber, 2001:22).

Kluckhohn emphasized that there is an intrinsic relation between values/morals on one side and human action on the other side. “Morals – and all group values – are the products of social interaction as embodied in culture” (Kluckhohn 1951:388). From a very general perspective, all value judgments are nothing else than “selective and discriminate ways of responding” (Kluckhohn, 1951:390). Nevertheless, “A value is not just a preference, but is a preference which is felt and/or considered to be justified morally”, states Kluckhohn at the beginning of his study (Kluckhohn 1951:396). He soon leaves this general framework and begins to set up a more concise definition of value. Thus, “value implies a code or a standard which has some persistence through time and organizes a system of action... and places things, acts, ways of behaving, goal of action on the approval-disapproval continuum” (Kluckhohn 1951:397). Thus, Kluckhohn stated that there is a connection between people’s thought, their moral preferences, their actions and behaviors.

Another perspective on values is supported by Robert S. Hartman, the thinker who coined the field of Formal and Applied Axiology. Hartman tried to develop a general delimitation for the study of values, and created a definition of *good* – the origin of any theory and discussion about morals and values, based on formal logic and away from the relativity of individuals’ statements and the cultural expressions it may take. Hartman objectively defined *good* as a concept fulfilling all its properties for being good. In his words, “a thing is good if it fulfills the intension of its concept” (Hartman 1969:103). Hartman further unpacks his axiom: the valuation involved in a sentence like “this car is good” and “the value predicate good, thus, is a property of concepts rather than of objects.” So, if somebody makes a statement like: “My car is good,” what he would like to say is that his car is in perfect mechanical condition and doesn’t have any missing parts that would prevent it from running. The same thing can be said about a good chair; for example, a good chair can well fulfill its function when being used for sitting, which implies that the chair doesn’t have a missing leg or a broken part that would make it unsuitable for its intended purpose. And what one applies to material things may also apply to human relationships and behaviors in certain situations; these, in their turn, may be evaluated by the same criteria, according to a definition of good found in the subjects' own mind.

Whenever we act in a moral or axiological sense, we perform this set of actions by referring to a series of pre-established definitions that we have in our minds. Even though they are the product of our interactions within a social and cultural environment - thus tributary to the context in which they emerged and, accordingly, depending on a relative

horizon -, these definitions belong to the intension of specific concepts. Thus, as defined by Hartman, the good lies precisely in this intensional sphere of concepts. This holds true for any rational being who makes moral assertions in a social environment, hence the universality of Hartman's definition of good.

What makes Hartman's theory valuable is the fact that it draws attention on something quite simple: everybody makes valuation assertions about what is good and what is bad, and these are strictly related to definitions they have in mind. Particularly within communities where peer pressure on individual behavior is strong, people guide their actions mostly around these definitions. These definitions might never or almost never be evident in discourse at the level of formal assertions, but they exist behind it and might later be discovered through the analysis of people's actions and behaviors in the community. With this Hartmanian model in mind, one might pay more attention to the cultural-political-economic interstices where people's assertions are formed, and to the way they produce these judgments depending on the definitions they have in mind.

Therefore, Kluckhohn and Hartman make us aware that people's value judgments are always connected inside a system of values where the individual ego is always connected inside a system of relations to community, to things, to actions, to statements and to relations and realities that are born as a result of these interactions. From these interactions result "realities" like personhood, work ethics, family relations, community relations including reciprocity and so on. But these are connected to a logical horizon - that of the intension of the concepts. This horizon remains unchanged irrespective of the more or less relative value of the definitions that make it up. That is why, looking at people's system of values and especially to its daily reproduction is, in a way, similar to what Geertz stated when recommending anthropologists "to read over the shoulders" of those people whom they study and who are the active producers of a culture (Geertz 1972:29).

## **2. Peasant Communities Laden with Values**

Starting from the observation that our moral valuing assertions are tributary to a certain economic, political and social context that they are also expressing in some way, I begin this analysis by highlighting certain economic-demographic data. The 2011 population census shows that the *comună* of Heleşteni had 2669 inhabitants, with 1244 of them being employed. 929 persons of these 1244 people work in agriculture. This means that a total of 75.6% of the active labor force is involved in agriculture field. Ruginoasa faces a similar

situation with a population of 5981 persons, out of which 3078 are employed, and 2190 work in agriculture - the equivalent of 71.1% (Iași County Bureau of Statistics). Besides this, all retired and unemployed people are also involved in various ways in the agricultural labor. Even the rest of the population, active in various economic fields mainly connected to the industry in neighboring towns or in local administration and schools, practices small-scale agriculture too, as a part-time occupation.

Maybe this is one of the main causes leading to still extant cohesive peasant communities inside these localities, despite the external influences undermining day by day this type of existence. This is also one of the main reasons why these communities build their social life based on firm values and principles. Using one of Kluckhohn's expressions, I am going to call them communities "heavily laden with values". These interweave of values and moral principles is permanently obvious in the peoples' words, behaviors, perspectives and reactions, but not necessarily in their formal discourses. But the only impediment is that one needs a lot of time to be able to understand this dense and complex text (Geertz 1972), and especially to be able to read this text between the lines. Only after spending a few months in Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, have I started developing a sort of dexterity in detecting the community values when starting to put together the complex puzzle in front of me.

One of the most significant such moments happened in early June 2012, during a day unusually hot for late Spring. I was waiting for Florin close to his parents' agriculture field, a few kilometers far from the village. That hot day, they were hoeing a potato field. Florin promised me that, after finishing his work, he would help me get in touch with a villager for an interview that was supposed to happen that day. While I was waiting for him in the shade of his horse carriage, I looked around and saw people hoeing their lands in small groups of usually two or three. When the sun temperature peaked at midday, I saw the people hiding away of the heat, and taking a small break in the shade of a tree, or even going home for a brief rest. A lady who seemed about thirty-five years old, together with her 11-year old boy, was returning from the field, carrying the hoes on their shoulders. I saluted them when they passed by the carriage. They saluted me too, and then the lady asked me: "What's happened to you? Have you lost your hoe?"

This seemed to be a mere question, but, knowing the area and its inhabitants, I managed to seize its subtlety right away. What this rhetoric question wanted to say in fact was a critique of a strong man who just stayed by the field without working on it. More, it

also contained that woman's perspective on men. Beyond the proper assertion, there lay another unspoken one, somehow implied by the multiple meanings of the question: "I am a woman and I have worked hard all day in the field together with my young son, while you are a man and you waste time uselessly by the field. So I deserve respect and appreciation, and you don't!" More than that, this simple sentence also included a valuation of the physical labor that could be synthesized as: "In agriculture, physical labor is good even if it involves physical effort, while inactivity and laziness are bad and morally degrading." It also hid one more final allusion. The woman I am talking about realized immediately that I was not from the village. Thus, another type of moralizing perspective could be summarized as: "We, the inhabitants of this village, work hard and thus we deserve appreciation; but the people in other areas are not like us, they try to stay away of hard physical labor."

During my stay in Heleşteni, it became obvious many times that physical labor in agriculture was valued. However, after this exchange, I accepted the critique and, whenever I went to the field with a villager, I tried to lend a hand to the ones I knew, since it was obvious that this behavior would be appreciated. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 the *comună's* mayor organized a *clacă*<sup>41</sup> for hoeing the agricultural land belonging to *Centrul de Zi pentru Copii Săraci/The Day Center for Poor Children* in Hărmăneasa village. This center was under the township hall's administration and it functioned by self-management. The food offered to needy children came mostly from the agricultural lands of the center. But in order to have these plots cultivated and taken care of, many people were needed. Therefore, when hoeing had to be done, the mayor asked the city hall's employees to do that. However, that work meant spending a weekend day for all the ones involved; so the mayor had to make use of the prestige he had among his employees in order to convince them to perform the activity. That year, without being aware of that from the start, I managed to make things easier for him.

That particular morning, I joined the mayor and his wife at the center's land, and worked side by side with the city hall's employees for hoeing the potato field. This perplexed all the employees, since they knew I work at a university in the United States. As a result, they kept joking about me during the entire job. "See, professor, what happened if you didn't like America?! Is it better to hoe here, in Heleşteni?" one of the city hall's employees asked

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<sup>41</sup> *Clacă*: in many of the villages I have researched the ritual called *clacă* still exists under different forms. Essentially, it involves the accomplishment of an extensive task that is demanding both in matters of time and intensity, and that could not be finished only by a single family's members. In this case, that particular family asks other people in the village - especially relatives, friends or neighbors - for help. This help is given without any expectation for a financial reward, but it makes the ones receiving it feel obliged to help the other ones back later by offering a similar service.

me. Again, his statement hid more meanings than one might notice at a first sight. The basic idea the villager wanted to transmit was: "If you want to be just like us, here, in Heleşteni, you have to work a great deal. But this hard work gives you moral nobility. Even if life in other corners of the world is easier, the hard work in Heleşteni makes the ones performing it superior to others." This is also an instance of value judgment regarding the agricultural labor and the standpoint of the ones performing it.

This type of valuation made by the members of the agricultural community about the physical labor they did has been observed by other anthropologists, too, under similar circumstances:

For Bulgarian villagers, the physical labor that characterizes their activities is a means of claiming moral superiority: rural inhabitants see themselves as hard working and not afraid of 'dirtying their hands'. This same grounding of moral virtue through hard work is also evident in urban Hungarians' desire to maintain their links to the land (Leonard and Kaneff 2001:33).

Another fact about my status as an anthropologist in a small and relatively isolated locality: my presence created confusion among the inhabitants. One day in April 2012, I was walking towards the mayor's office of Heleşteni, since my car was broken. From my host's house to the city hall, there were around four kilometers. The people I met on the village street answered my greeting, though they looked at me puzzled since I did not belong to that place. Suddenly, an older middle aged man asked me the following when I said hello: "Tu al cui eşti, mă?!"/ eng. "Hey you, whose are you?" Once again, the question seemed simple, but it had a whole universe of meanings and value judgments behind it. For such a question, the answer was supposed to be simple and quite standardized, such as: "I am the son of Ion Chirilă known as Parafiru." Inside the village, youngsters used to be identified by the elder ones through their family of origin, to which they sometimes added a nickname that helped community members identify the family easier, or at least the head of the family - the father. The family somebody came from would already say a lot about its social status in the village world and the respect it enjoyed or, on the contrary, the peasants' disdain of it, automatically reflected on their perception of the person they were talking to. The answer I gave to the villager's question was totally unlike standard answers: "You cannot know me. I am not from here," "That's what I've thought, too", the man said, satisfied with his intuition.



I experienced the same dilemma when, on April the 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012, I went to conduct an interview with one of the villagers in Oboroceni. The meeting I had with Vasile Lupu, the householder, was utterly memorable. When entering his courtyard, his wife - who already knew me - wanted to introduce me to her husband, but he greeted me as if he had been knowing me for a long time. When asked by his wife if he knew me, he mentioned the name of a villager he thought I was. That moment, his wife told him I was not even from that village. As a result, the man asked: "Then whom are you visiting in the village?". Once again, the peasant was trying to identify me by relating me to a family that I might have been visiting in the village. "I'm not here to visit anybody. I'm a professor." I replied. "And you teach where? In Oboroceni or in Heleşteni village?" the man asks me once again. "No, no, I don't teach here, I teach at the university." I answer. "Ah, at the university in Iași... And you've come here to some friend in the village..." This confusion was not accidental at all since it came from the fact that, for most villagers living in the Heleşteni *comună*, the geographic universe of the locality was inextricably linked to that of the community and families populating it. Therefore, any person inside the locality's physical frontiers was somehow supposed to be related to the social, cultural and moral world of that particular community.

Family and community have often been emphasized as important elements within the rural universe during the discussions I had while conducting my field research. In one of these discussions, Hâra Constantin declared: "Especially in the past, some decades ago, family was one of the most important things in the village world. This happened because everything you represented as individual - esteem, prestige, economic situation - came from the family. More directly, without a family, you as individual meant nothing and could not even live your life in the village. Because back then everything was based on agriculture and the land used to be inherited from the family, too. This situation still stands nowadays, but yet there are also many changes that society went through, especially economic changes that diminished the role of the family and also of the community in the relationships between people" (May 2, 2012, Oboroceni, field notes).

The way the people of Heleşteni saw things, family as social cell was closely connected to agricultural work. The two were attaching to and strengthening one another in an indissoluble relation, creating in turn the profile of personhood in the village world. Thus, a good householder was hardworking, and his effort was precisely meant to provide the necessary resources for his family's existence. On the contrary, the head of the family

(husband and father) drinking alcohol and spending more time in pubs was not well-seen, but criticized inside the village. This behavior was perceived as an excessive waste of an important part of the income that should belong to his family. In the locals' vision, alcohol consumption was synthesized in a parable I have heard from at least a dozen people:

In the past, just about 30-40 years ago, only married men were allowed to drink in local pubs. For a married man, drinking in a pub was a sign of high status and prestige. If a young man dared to enter a local pub, he would be kicked out by the elders, and sent home immediately.

Once again, the story's lesson is deeper and transmits much more than one could perceive from a first glance. The underlining meaning was that a family man could afford to have a glass of wine every once in a while with his comrades who were also heads of families. This activity proved that the householder in question had enough economic resources to support his family and also enjoyed the privilege of being able to spend some of his work's extra income together with other locals that had the same social status. But a young man had to save the resources to found a family for which he first had to provide a shelter and a decent life. But these benefits could only come from a balanced and especially assiduous work.

I have observed the way peasants value agricultural labor from a completely different perspective, too - the way the community regarded the thieves in the village. Sitting once at the table with my host, Mrs. Doina Hâra, and hearing the church bell tolling, I asked her if anybody had passed away. I knew that the bell is usually tolled on such occasions. The answer I got was utterly amazing. "This time they toll the bell for thieves!" "How come?", I asked again. "Well, if somebody from the village steals something, especially from another villager's corn barn, or any other of the neighbors' agricultural products, let's say, the bell is tolled. And the thief knows the bell tolls for him. Therefore, if the thief still has some trace of belief in God and humanity in him, he brings the stolen good back during the night. For if he doesn't do that, many evils and troubles might come upon him, as a sort of divine punishment" (March 20, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes).

In the case of this situation, too, the story's hidden meanings had to be found by relation to other values in the village world. In this case, the basic idea was that the thief had no respect for the work done by the householder's family and, as a result, the thief had to be punished by invoking divine justice. Besides this divine justice, one also proved thus the community's willingness to solve its conflicts alone, without making use of external

authorities such as the court or the police. This type of communitarian autonomy also spoke about an original manner of mediating village conflicts - an approach deeply rooted in the locality's history.

However, I managed to find out that the bell was tolled only in extreme cases and that it was regarded as an ultimate method of correcting those community members who "had taken dishonest paths in life", according to a frequent expression I had heard from many inhabitants of Heleşteni. I found out this from Mitică, one of the villagers who had become my close friend during my field research in the *comună*. Despite the closeness, I have never managed to convince him to call me by my first name: Alin. "I cannot, Mr. Professor, you are too schooled", Mitică would often justify, going on calling me "Mr. Alin" or "Mr. Professor". He was the bell-ringer of the village, and his wife worked as a seller in the village shop that belonged to their wedding godfather, the mayor of Heleşteni. Although both of them had low salaries, Mitică declared many times that he would never leave the village. It was a world that matched him, he had told me, and he would not change it for anything else. Despite the fact that he had two brothers living in Portugal where they had been working in constructions for years, Mitică had never been tempted to leave Heleşteni. Maybe that is precisely why he had also developed a strong attachment to this world and its values.

One day in early July, another villager told me that Mitică had hit a 65 years old woman. The fact seemed a mere invention to me since I had never perceived him as either violent or capable of hitting an aged woman. When meeting him in the village street, I tried to joke about the rumor I had just heard. The honesty he proved unveiling the whole story to me left me absolutely defenseless and disoriented. "Yes, Mr. Professor, it's true I beat her. I kicked her twice in the rear and pulled her head twice. I did this because I had caught her with my chicken in hand. Do you know how hard it is to raise a chicken?! And so, how was I supposed to stay and do nothing when I saw her with my chicken in her hand?!" "But why haven't you tolled the bell?", I thought of asking since Mitică was also the bell-ringer of the village church. "I don't want to do such things because the bell is very dangerous, Mr. Professor. Accidents happened to certain people, they were left without a hand or a leg or, God forbid, even worse! So I just gave her what I considered she deserved and that was it... But the weird thing is she complained to my godfather only now, and that's how afterwards everybody knew. I beat her around April, before Easter, and she's only complained now. Since then, she has come to hoe on my land and worked in my garden, she came a few times

in our house. In case my godfather asks me what and how, I tell him the truth just as I have told you. I am not ashamed of that!"

Mitică's story had its lesson, too. The violent correction applied to another community member seemed to be justified in the villagers' perspective precisely because that person had broken one of the basic principles of village community life: respecting a family's work and effort invested into its household goods. Nevertheless, the punishment had to be fair when compared to the damage, and should not cause irreversible losses to the person in question who was, finally and despite her deed, just another community member and a neighbor of the villager she stole from.

This entire journey inside the world of small rural localities - and especially in Heleşteni where the village community was more cohesive - can demonstrate the way the community members express value judgments, even if not by stating them explicitly. Such behaviors and facts - described by means of examples - prove that, within rural communities, there is a sort of deeply rooted set of values that may be revealed by analyzing the culture regarded as a text prone to be deciphered, but especially as a text that may be read between the lines. In the meanwhile, this analysis proved the systemic structure of rural values, with the inextricable links between the elements forming it - elements that are never isolated or autonomous, but indissolubly connected in a sometimes very complex interweave of relations and associations that form the social fundament of the rural world. However, these relations and values may be very well observed - perhaps better than anywhere else - when analyzing the mummies' plays.

### **3. Reading Over People's Shoulders When They Perform Mummies Plays**

It has been stated that mummies' plays are a social order reverse (Kligman 1981:xi). Without contradicting this statement, I shall try to present its nuances and to show how these collective rituals are strictly connected to the village community norms and also to the moral values and principles of these rural communities.

During these plays, there are behaviors that can be interpreted as transgressions of community norms. Because of this, the first impression could be that mummies' plays might also be perceived as cultural forms by which social norms functioning throughout the whole year inside the community are temporarily abolished. Impressed by the richness of manifestations, symbols and representations during winter holidays, even I concluded during

my first trip to Heleşteni area, that mummers' plays challenge the community social order, and that the solid norms and rules of the community may no longer be that influent when this different world unfolds itself entirely.

By the end of 2010, my impression was about to be invalidated during my second fieldwork session for the winter holidays. One of the youngsters with a bad reputation in Heleşteni, known by villagers as being violent, dishonest and difficult to cope with, surprised everybody when he announced that he had organized a *Goat team*. The news surprised the locals who did not know how to perceive it: was it a positive change of the young man or just another challenge he had launched against the community? Everybody knew that organizing a *Goat team* was a difficult task that involved a flawless planning, had to be prepared in advance and seriously. It did not only concern the recruitment of the team members, but also the realization of costumes and the preparation of the play that was about to be performed in front of the householders. But it was difficult to believe that a person with such a reputation would be able to coordinate the whole moment.

Indeed, problems have not stopped showing up beginning with the first events that were supposed to take place for the organization of the *Goat team*. According to village tradition, on December the 27<sup>th</sup>, the Goat team leaders had to present their team in front of the villagers, in the cultural center where afterwards they had to offer wine and *țuică/brandy* to the viewers. This settled the team's organization and was in the meantime the equivalent of an announcement made in front of the village community about the members and the *comoraș* of that particular team that was supposed to walk around the village on December the 31<sup>st</sup> and January the 1<sup>st</sup>. However, that youngster's team did not join this event. The fact caused rumor among the villagers who criticized it harshly: "Well yes, as usual, this boy just wants to get as much as he can from the villagers, without giving anything back". The truth was that the beverage the *Goat team* leader was supposed to offer to the villagers present for the presentation on December the 27<sup>th</sup> required money or at least some work investment in case it came from the family's vineyard. But it seems that that *comoraș* was not willing to invest this into the presentation. The villagers' comments included this and something else. Although not willing to invest the money, by visiting the family houses with the *Goat team*, on December the 31<sup>st</sup> and January the 1<sup>st</sup>, according to tradition, the team members were supposed to receive money, food and drinks from the villagers. In this situation, there was a transformation of the kind of generalized reciprocity accepted by the community and meant

to benefit both parties, into a negative reciprocity that would allow the *Goat team* leader to be the only one earning something (Sahlins 1974:194-196).

But this was only the first of the whole series of problems this team caused. Once in the villagers' houses, the team made the people think that "the representation offered by that parade had been weak", while "the members' costumes had been made in a hurry." But the last straw came after the two days of ceremonies. On January the 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, some of my close friends had already found out that the young man had not shared fairly the money gotten after the two caroling days, giving only a very small amount to the other team members and keeping the rest for himself. The village tradition was that the *comoraș* would gather the money given by the householders after the performance. However, in the end the sum of money collected was approximate, and the *comoraș* could leave aside part of it before sharing it 'fairly' with the rest of the team. Following this happening, I heard rough comments in the village about that youngster: "For sure this was his first and last *Goat!*" Indeed, in the following years that young man did not organize any other *Goat team*, and none of the guy of his age would want to join him, while householders in Heleșteni would not have opened their doors for him, either. This way, the *Goat ritual* proved once again its efficiency in directing the community's values and principles, emphasizing eloquently a person's negative traits and censuring this person's potential future negative deeds.

Not only folk plays such as the *Goat* or the *Deer* are circumscribed by the limits and rules established by the community, but also the *Pantomimic Mummies'* groups, where the freedom of action and improvisation is bigger than in other customs within the large category of mummies' plays. An event that reinforced my conviction happened on December the 24<sup>th</sup> 2011, and I was exactly the one causing it. By the end of 2011, I arrived for the third time in Heleșteni *comună*. My hosts and their entire family already knew me well, so I had taken the freedom of playing a joke. Arriving in Oboroceni in the afternoon of December the 24<sup>th</sup>, before entering the house, I put on a Halloween mask that I wanted to use for myself during the New Year days. After having entered the courtyard, I performed my mummer part seriously and knocked at the door, changing my voice right away in order to avoid recognition.

The one who opened the door was my host's niece, Andreea. She was alone at home with another cousin of hers who had come from the town of Suceava to visit her relatives in Heleșteni. Half surprised, half scared by the appearance of the "mummer", she asked me

"What do you want?" "I came to carol." I replied decisively. "But why now, is this the time to carol?", Andreea asked annoyed suddenly. "But when?!", I replied with a sense of wonder in my voice. "Well, on December the 31<sup>st</sup> as everybody else!". "But I want to do it now!".

"What the hell does this man want?", Andreea asked her younger cousin who was also surprised. "Come on December the 31<sup>st</sup>, too, and we shall welcome you", she gave a sort of solution for the unpredicted situation. "No, I want it now!", I insisted on a seemingly furious tone. "This one is either drunk or crazy!", Andreea told her cousin. "Tell me what I should do about him!", she asked the other girl once more, visibly in trouble and trying to find a way out of the complicated situation she found herself in. That moment, I took my mask off and Andreea gave a sigh of relief: "Oh God, Alin, it's you! You really scared me! I thought there might have been who knows what crazy man!"

Seeing Andreea's reaction, I decided to go on with my joke and play it on other family members. Finding out that Mrs. Doina, my host, was at the shop she had in her courtyard, I went there. I entered the shop through the back door which was used only by employees and owners. Inside the shop, I saw Mrs. Doina and Dana, her younger daughter, serving the customers. "Do you welcome the mummers?", I began my sketch. Mrs. Doina was known to be a fierce woman, able to face even the rudest mummers, but now she needed a few seconds to come back from her state of amazement. Afterwards, re-becoming herself - the decided and organized host I used to know - she started: "But, Sir, is this the time for mummers? And in such a manner, through the back door?". "But when is the right time?", I replied acting as if I did not know that at all. "Well, for sure you know it well, I don't have to tell you that. Look, I'm going to open here and you are going to go out nice and easy through the front door.". "Don't you want to welcome the mummers?", I went on. Inside the shop, some clients were watching the scene with curiosity and a bit of confusion. "Yes, we do welcome them, we do, but not now. We welcome them when it's the time, not when anybody decides to." That moment, from behind the counter, Dana started laughing: "Mom, it's Alin, can't you see?". That moment, as any mummer who had been recognized, I respected the rule of the game and took the mask off my face. The situation made Mrs. Doina laugh, and she let a few words with a sense of embarrassment: "But, Sir, what are you doing? You come and scare us like that! And look what a beautiful mask you have!". "I've brought it from America!", I replied right away. The next moment, a local who had witnessed the whole scene seized the opportunity and asked me: "I've noticed it's a *real* mask. Would you sell it to me?". "How much do you offer for it?", I asked, pretending to be interested. "40 lei" he shouted, hoping he

would get the American mask. The price he had offered was the double of what I had paid in a Walmart shop. "I cannot sell it because I still need it.", I answered, to the local's disappointment.

The sequence I had created voluntarily made me understand that, despite the apparent disorder that the mummers generated with their actions and behaviors, they were still subjected to certain strict rules. All the ritual events at the end of the year were perfectly circumscribed by what the community had decided that could happen during the short holiday season when the behavior of the people inside the community was different, but kept respecting some pre-established rules that were clear for everybody. Surprisingly, just a few days afterwards, I was about to witness another episode that completed the one I have just described above.

December the 31<sup>st</sup> is one of the most tiresome days for the families in the village and especially for the wealthier ones - such as my hosts - since they always received all the bands that knocked at their door. Two days before, the family's members were involved in preparing the sweets and the food for the holidays. For the few dozens of teams that were about to visit the household, a household needed a huge quantity of sweets and food, next to the drinks - juice, beer and wine. All these meant an increased effort for the most hospitable hosts who would only get few hours of sleep the nights before the New Year. But the New Year's Night was particularly exhausting because of the physical effort and the lack of sleep.

In 2011, the evening before the New Year's Eve and the whole following night, until 5 a.m., at least 20 mummers' groups walked around the houses, plus the small groups of 2-3 children caroling - about 25 groups in all -, two *Goat teams* and other two *Deer teams*. Around 4:30 a.m., a state of tranquility began, and the family members started a discussion about the possible arrival of some mummers' groups. Around 5 a.m., as no other group had shown up meanwhile, the last family members - the mayor and his wife - went to rest a little. They were probably hoping that in case an early morning mummers' team passed by, they would be woken up by the noises mummers usually make when entering the courtyard.

However, it seemed that the fatigue of the days before had affected all the family members and also the relatives visiting them - they were all sleeping in various corners of the house filled with people to the last inch. Even I lay down a little on a bed I was offered close to the window where mummers would pass by and the door where they would be welcomed into the house. Less than half an hour later, just the moment I had managed to doze a little, I



heard the specific noise produced by a mummers' team. All my life I have been a very light sleeper, no matter how tired I was. So I heard mummers, and I expected to see some moves around the house any moment, thinking that one of the family members would wake up, too, in order to welcome the mummers. But it seemed that the fatigue had been stronger this time, and none of them woke up. That moment, I was curious to see what would happen, and I focused on hearing what mummers might say to one another in such a situation. At a certain point, one of them knocked at the door stronger, and the entire group made a very loud noise with their rattles. But this time, once again, the family members had no reaction. I immediately heard the mummers talking, but I could only grasp a few fragments from what they were saying. The only clear statement I heard at the end, when the mummers decided to leave, was: "We came too late. Mr. Mayor has gone to sleep."

The next day, around 8 a.m., I was woken up once again by some noises. This time, they were produced by the people of the house, woken up just a short while ago. Since the house was full of guests and any corner would be useful, I woke up in a hurry and made my bed, although my strongest wish was to sleep at least a few hours more. Right after I woke up, the hosts laid the table and started to talk about the mummers' teams, the *Goat* and *Deer* plays and all the other ones expected, as each year at this time. I let them talk for a while and then uttered a statement that would become the breaking news of the day, as I would soon find out: "But you know that there was another group of mummers after you went to bed, right?" The silence and the looks of the people upon hearing this statement made me understand that something was not alright. The first one coming back to her senses was Mrs. Doina who encouraged me to tell them everything I knew. So I presented them what had happened. "Should I have woken you up?", I asked them in the end. "It would've been better." the mayor managed to articulate. "Weeell, I had seen you were so tired and thought it was not worth waking you up since the mummers would anyway show up again the next day." "You see, things are not really like that. If they came and we didn't open the door for them, they would not show up again." "How come?", I asked. "They have their own sense of dignity and, then, that's the rule: if you didn't open the door for them, they would not come to you anymore." "And what will happen now?", I asked again curiously. "They are going to spread rumors around the village that I did not welcome them." "But it's also their fault, why did they show up so late?", I tried to find an excuse. "No, no, it's rather our fault, we were supposed to stay awake or at least to sleep in turns so that there is always someone to welcome these early morning mummers."

During the next hours, I witnessed worried discussions between the mayor and his wife, with suppositions about the identity of that team's members. After a detective search and the elimination of several possibilities, the mayor reached the conclusion that there were only few groups that could have made that early morning visit. Taking his courage in both hands, the mayor started making phone calls asking the potential carolers if they had not been the mummers visiting him. After about three such phones, he gave up and said, in a completely desolate and slightly embarrassed voice: "I knew that would happen! Nobody wants to admit now. That's it. There is nothing else we can do. It's gone now. Maybe I'll be able to find out somehow from the village."

Later I found that that, in many cases, when the householders do not want to open the door, and mummers figure this out by hearing voices inside the house or seeing the lights turned on, they plan a little act of revenge. Often this consists of pulling the courtyard's gate out of the gutters and moving it a few tens of meters further. This way, the householder and his family would have to spend more time and energy to repair the damage than they would have spent by welcoming the mummers. Mentioning a similar tradition in Romanian villages, the folklorist Petru Caraman speaks about a ritual called *descolindat* (eng. *de-caroling/ un-caroling*). Instead of reciting a poem that wishes the family wealth and good crops, the groups of carolers who had not been received by the householders recite the sorrows and misfortunes that are about to affect that particular family (Caraman 1997).

All these discussions and events revealed to me the fact that, far from being just a reversal of the social order, these customs actually had their strict order, established by an unanimously accepted set of norms, closely connected to the values of the village. Among these ones, an important one was the generalized reciprocity requiring that the service provided at a certain moment to some persons within the community be given back immediately or after a certain time. In this case, it became obvious that these forms of folk plays embodied a generalized reciprocity. The carolers gave the householders their wishes and good thoughts, or a theatre play into which they had invested a good deal of their spare time before the holidays, and received in exchange the householders' hospitality, represented by the drinks, food and sweets in the case of *Pantomimic Mummers*, and money in the case of folk plays like the *Goat* and the *Deer*.

This amount of money has caused long discussions in the literature about mummers (Gailey 1969). Most of the authors dealing with this topic have tried to detect a moment long

ago when instead of money there was another type of service, since that would have been closer to a domestic mode of production specific to "cultures lacking a political state, and it applies only insofar as economy and social relations have not been modified by the historic penetration of states" (Sahlins 1974:188). Nevertheless, as I will show in the next chapter, such an attempt is in vain. In the history of peasantry and rural communities, various social, political and economic events influenced in different ways the climate of the cultural micro-ecosystems. As I observed in the case of Heleşteni *comună*, the fieldwork revealed, along with the analysis of winter rituals, both types of reciprocity - one based on an exchange unmediated by money, the other on an exchange where money were present.

However, even the type of balanced reciprocity (Idem 1972:194-195) mediated by money could not be regarded roughly as a sort of intrusion of the monetary economy into the natural economy of rural communities, causing irreversible effects and transformations on it (Sorokin, Zimmerman, and Galpin 1971). In fact, what I have found was a sort of combination where local economy and market economy based on money were both present in the community networks and their rules. I reached this conclusion by analyzing several discussions and interviews with the performers of these rituals. Perhaps the most relevant discussion in this respect took place on January the 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, with the members of the *Goat team* in Cucuteni village, just few kilometers away from Heleşteni. That day, I had joined their team for a few hours walk in Cucuteni village, visiting the householders, and thus I had the opportunity to have more detailed talks with the team members. "Why do you go with the *Deer* around the village? Is it for money?". "We don't do it for money. For you have also seen that we perform it the same way both for those who gave us 50 lei and for an old woman who gave us 5 lei. If we performed for the money, probably we would not visit the pensioners anymore. But we visit all those who welcome us. We do it because we like it, because it's beautiful" (January 1, 2010, Cucuteni village, field notes).

It became obvious that a type of combination between balanced and generalized reciprocity was transmitted through these customs. For this reason the human relations involved in these folk plays were mediated by money. Nevertheless money was not the only impetus that motivated performers to play in the courtyards of the householders. These kinds of complex interactions among people through the medium of folk plays and the thick symbols and networks created around them there were also present in the case of social relations, which were less visible at a first sight. I discovered this hidden landscape, just later during my third visit to Heleşteni due to my friendship with some of the villagers involved in

these rituals. On the evening of December, the 28<sup>th</sup> 2011, for instance, I had the chance to witness the process of mask designing by Mitică, one of the most skilled craftsmen in Oboroceni village. Mask design is very exquisite and could sometimes last even for a whole week. I only witnessed a part of the process, and that already seemed extremely painstaking and greatly time-consuming. Mitică told me that such a mask costs between 300 and 330 Euros. And indeed, in previous years he had managed to sell several masks to some boys from the village who worked in Italy and only came home for the New Year. The immigrants from Italy did not have time anymore to do the mask themselves, but they had the money to buy it, so they approached Mitică and other craftsmen in the village for that service. Mitică told me that the mask he was working at this time was to be offered to his godfather's younger daughter. Dana wanted very much to join the mummers that year and that was the reason why she had been present during different stages of the process of mask design.

"Are you going to ask Dana money for the mask?", I asked Mitică, knowing that the relations between godparents and *fini* (eng. *godchildren*) in that area of Moldova were very strong, similar to blood relations.

"Wouldn't I be a pig if I asked her for the money?", Mitică replied decisively.

"Why do you say that?", I asked somehow puzzled by his aggressive answer.

"Well, how could I do such a thing when my godfather helps me whenever I need, my wife works in his shop and, more, they often lend me money. In addition, I would want Dana to mention me when she wears the mask I gave her. That is to say I would like her to speak well about me, not badly" (December 28, 2011, Oboroceni village, field notes).

I have often heard the comparison with the pig - a domestic animal considered filthy and disgusting - expressed by the peasants in the area and especially in Oboroceni. It was mostly uttered as a rhetoric question ("But am I really pig enough to do this?") and always related to the potential unfulfillment of a form of generalized reciprocity.

In this case, the way close relationships between the villagers prevailed under the form of generalized reciprocity, became obvious once again during the dense winter holidays full of events. Another topic that came to light by analyzing the value judgments of the villagers and the way these judgments revealed themselves in mummers' plays was the social inequality in the *comună*. Although delicate and little talked about publicly by villagers, this topic was closely related to the village value system and especially to the villagers' approach

to work and its pair - play - involving entertainment and, in the meantime, a special way of relating to personhood.

#### **4. Community, Rituals, Values and Social Inequalities**

As Kligman and Verdery observed, inside the village world there is a pyramidal universe of social hierarchy that includes poor, average level and rich people ("hierarchical universe of peasantry itself"). In this universe, richness and poverty were equivalents of the human quality of the individuals forming the rural community:

These categories had moral entailments. In the rural status ideology, being prosperous was considered a sign of virtue and hard work: villagers often attributed such qualities to the well-to-do even if they were lacking. Being poor indicated lack of character, laziness, or bad habits such as drinking (rather than, say, simple bad luck). Such qualities were thought to be inherited (Kligman and Verdery 2011:91).

This perspective on the social inequalities inside the village probably became most apparent when observing carefully the way mummers' plays and their performers were approached by villagers. A simple happening made me aware of all this. By the end of March 2012, I joined the mayor of Heleşteni in his trip to Iași where he had a series of issues to solve for the township hall, and I also had to meet some professors from the University of Iași. On the main street of Heleşteni, a lady who was an employee of the *comună* hall got into the car, too, for she was also going to Iași to solve certain local administrative problems. I gave her right away the front seat next to the driver, the mayor. Without knowing anything about whom I was, the lady started talking to the mayor about the *Deer* ritual in Heleşteni and about the ones performing it. At a certain point, she stated something that perplexed me that moment: "*The Deer* is rather performed by the drunkards in the *comună*. A decent householder stays with his family for the New Year and does not walk around the village all night with the children", she stated laughing (March 27, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes).

Surprised by her remark, I tried to approach the same topic with my closest acquaintances in the *comună* and truest friends: Constantin, the mayor of the *comună*, and Florin, the sports teacher. They had never hesitated in talking to me freely about any topic I tried to deal with. Indeed, although not as eager to talk as usual, they gave me anyway some data about this topic. Florin tried to offer me an overall view on the general perspective of the inhabitants in Heleşteni: "About the ones performing the *Deer*, one usually says: take a look

at this person, he works for his family even during the New Year while others stay home having fun" (March 29, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes).

Another day, few weeks later, discussing the same topic, Florin recalled a meaningful happening from his own childhood:

When I was about ten, a child of my age moved with his family in my village. They were richer, his family worked as veterinary at the *Consumer Protection Service* in Pașcani and earned a good salary. In our classroom, there was a talk among all of us as colleagues, including the newly arrived boy, that we would go out that year with the custom called *Steaua* during Christmas. Upon hearing this, he was very willing to join us all, and even prepared for that. But, just a few days before the event, his father told him: «How should I let you go there! What do you expect? The people to say you're so poor that you go out for the money!». That is how people who are better off and do not know the rules of the place too well regard the situation. They don't think this is a beautiful tradition, they rather think about the image they might lose (April 23, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes).

Constantin gave me valuable extra information on the topic: the householder's perspective, as a man used to welcome these teams year by year. He said: "Indeed, the *Deer* performers are poor people. Because a householder does not go out with the *Deer* during the New Year, he stays at home and welcomes it. Actually this is what makes him a householder - the fact that he can offer something to another one who is poorer" (April 25, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes). From this standpoint, folk plays were not only an expression of simple generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1974:193), but also a complex process of redistribution of community resources where wealthier people in the village offered something of their surplus to the needy ones (Idem 1974:190). The idea of redistributing the surplus within the community was confirmed to me by an event with a similar function. After the morning church service on Christmas day, people with a better economic situation from the *comună* put money together and bought oranges and sweets. All these products were offered when leaving to those who had attended the church service that day.

A closer look at mummers' plays shows us that they represent neither a restatement of the social inequalities in the rural world, nor a reversal of the social roles already existing like in the case of the Roman Saturnalia. Many of these rituals involve a sort of symbolic reconciliation between the poor and the rich in the *comună*, by means of staging plays.

During a play, the social differences vanish because a play is the same for everybody and it responds to a universal need of the human spirit. Because of that, knowing how to have fun had become just another important human quality for the villagers, and the value judgments about mummers' plays prove that, next to work, play was part of rural communities' system of values.

Probably this was the reason why themes as freedom, playfulness, and transcendence were widely present during the entire winter holidays period. They were embodied by some other preferences, including the joy, mirth and collective exuberance that a person needs to embrace during the entire ritual effervescence, from December the 24<sup>th</sup> to January the 6<sup>th</sup>. I deduced all this not only by observing people's behaviors, but also by analyzing their judgments laden with axiological overtones. An expression I heard among the peasants of Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, mostly during winter holidays was: "A true householder is the one who knows how to spend holidays in fun and cheerfulness!" Even the way personhood is defined necessarily includes this propensity towards play. As I showed in the previous chapter, there are householders who spend more than 2000 lei (\$500) during winter holidays. However, all this money does not only represent an investment in the community, but also an investment in the social construction of personhood within these rural communities "heavily laden with values".

## **5. Rural Communities and Their Sense of Play**

From all the observations above, I concluded that mummers' plays could be regarded as more than a simple model of a "reversing of the social order", rather as an expression of the community's system of values and of the subtle relations between all these values. Inside this picture, the idea of transcending the problems and difficulties typical of the mundane world of peasants, by means of derision and irony, is one of the most important ones. It appears for example in the *Dance of the Deer* and in the incantation whispered by the bear leader in the ear of his companion – *the deer*.

The realities exposed in *The Dance of the Deer*, including sickness, decrepitude, poverty, marriage market difficulties, ethnic relations and the pressure of the external economic market against the rural domestic mode of production were problems peasants were regularly faced with (see Wolf 1966). Satirizing all these realities at the end of the year was a way of transcending them and at the same time dealing with the conflicts and problems beyond the control of the fragile peasant world. Even the whispering of all these into the ear

of an animal was a parody of the fact peasants' problems were never listened to by political leaders. Ethnographic studies conducted during different periods of time in Romania have observed this use of social and political satire within village life (Mitrany 1930). This interpretation is reinforced by passages from the *deer master's* disenchantment who talks about the deep poverty of the villages in a mocking way: "I hung the knapsack on the hook/Flour in it there is nary/I put the pot on the fire/Firewood there is not any."

All in all, *The Dance of the Deer* embodies the whole complexity of the peasants' world, a world dominated not only by economic realities and pressures (as was usually depicted by political economists and economic anthropologists) but also by magic, tales, superstitions, a sense of play and playfulness. These dimensions belong to the peasants' world and together they are parts of the gearing of the system of values around which this world revolves. This includes economic and moral values as well as aesthetic and ludic ones – a detail that should not be forgotten.

The idea of transcending the social norms and all the problems of the mundane world appears not only in the *Dance of the Deer* and in the incantation whispered by the bear leader in the wild animal's ear, but also in the *Pantomimic Mummers'* ritual. The groups of mummers go to the households and, instead of behaving according to the ethic rural norms, they grab the householder by the head, hitting him with crochet scarves, puppets or thin wooden sticks. At the same time, the household women are kissed and groped in front of the head of the family. In spite of this, the mummers are offered cookies, food and drinks, and the families receive them happily. During the whole unfolding of these rituals, there are no class, status, social position or ethnic differences. Moreover, people belonging to the lower rungs of the social hierarchy get into their community's spotlight due to their reputation as talented dancers in the *Deer dance* ritual, as flute players in the suite of the *Deer and Goat*, or due to their inspired sketches performed within the groups of mummers.

Anything that might be a problem during the year, including dissension, fear or anxiety, is ridiculed, scoffed and mocked on this occasion. Dreadful realities such as death, illness, decrepitude, poverty and deprivation of all kinds, as well as inter-ethnic and social class relationships, along with the pride, the pomposity and the stupidity of politicians and TV stars are derided through these rituals. All these events occur even in the village of Ruginoasa where, after the morning violent confrontation between the masked youngsters,



they meet again around noon and celebrate together the *Malanca*, a conflict resolution ritual, dominated by dance, music and colorful masks adorned with hundreds of colorful beads.

Besides their multiple meanings revealed in Chapter II, the mummers' plays from the area of Heleşteni-Ruginoasa may be interpreted as a cultural response of the peasant rural communities against the strict rules of society, the inequalities and social injustices of all sorts, the absurd and wrong policies, corrupt politicians, disease, poverty, decrepitude and even death. In this response, we could discover the adaptive power of the village community, based on a community memory and on a system of values that allow villagers to transcend the narrow limits of their own social rules and all the dreads that keep them under the burden of immediate causality.

In this respect, the mummers' plays are “story(s) people tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1972:26). Due to this reason, at a first glance, the mummers' stories seem absurd. This happens because outsiders can only understand all the rules and values of the community (and the way these intertwine in a system) after a long time. Mummers' plays speak about the community's shortcomings but, in the meantime, they imagine a world with characters such as the homosexual, the prostitute, the transsexual, the transvestite, the pimp, all of them figures that are not normally included within the rigorous moral boundaries of the peasant community. During these theatrical manifestations, the rural community proves to be open to issues that in daily life would be impossible to accept or even imagine. By play, the community manages to transcend the limits it sets with its own norms and rules, but also the narrow horizon of present time and causality.

## **6. Rural Communities and Their Philosophical Sense of Transcendence**

The idea of transcending the social, economic, political and also biologic causality was something I have observed in many of the interviews I conducted over time with various mummers; yet, it was presented in the most eloquent way by a villager - mask designer - from the Krasnoyilsk *comună*, Storojineț *raion*<sup>42</sup>, Ukraine. In that particular *comună*, the custom of *Malanca*, which will be extensively described in the last chapter of this dissertation, represents a massive agglutination of more mummers: *calfa* (the apprentice, the journeyman) who led the *Malanca*, *the bears* (between 10 and 20), *kings and queens* (between 15 and 20), *old men and women* (between 4 and 8), *Jews* (between 15 and 30), *the little horses* (between

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<sup>42</sup> Raion - administrative division in Ukraine

5 and 7), *the Gypsies* who are in fact the bear leaders (between 10 and 20). Next to these main characters, there are secondary ones such as: doctors, politicians, policemen, stars, the ox-wagon, devils, death. This highly sensational ritual is celebrated enthusiastically each year and could generate strong feelings, especially when the physical body limitations are surpassed in matters of time, as Gheorghe, a 28-year old villager, told me during an interview:

We, who are alive, are just a link in this chain. And when I say chain I mean that every individual who joined the *Malanca* is part of a long row that goes far back in time and continues beyond the physical death of the individuals composing it. That particular chain is represented by the old people, the ancestors and all those who have ever joined this ritual and have somehow contributed to its continuation. But in fact the main idea is that all the *malancari* (eng. the ones performing the *Malanca*) are reborn, even the ones dead long ago and whose crosses and tombs are now vanished from the *comună's* cemeteries. But we, being still alive, we are able to revive them by preserving this custom. And one can feel that (Gheorghe Gherman, 28 years old, Crasna village, Krasnoyilsk, Ukraine, January 11, 2017, Interview).

My meeting with the villagers in Crasna, which will be the subject of a broader discussion in the last chapter of this work, was indeed revealing regarding how mummers' plays is a way of transcending the boundaries of the physical universe together with all the problems and the shortcomings that a peasant life may involve. But Gheorghe was the villager who managed to understand and explain better than anyone else this idea of personal self-loss when revealing what mummers' plays could really mean in the end.

For instance, when I put my mask on, I become the character that so many *malancari* have performed before me, and I become them. My identity as person vanishes behind the mask and what is left is a character who comes from the community's history and who has been embodied by hundreds and thousands of *malancari* before me.

Therefore, as a physical person performing a character in the *Malanca*, you no longer feel the pain, the cold or the fatigue during this ritual. You are going to feel all that once the custom is over, after a few days, but not during the *Malanca*. For, as long as you are behind this mask, you represent a sort of revival of all the *malancari* before you who had performed that character. That is in fact the essence of the *Malanca*. And this essence goes beyond the death and the life experienced by a physical body.

Because, when my physical body will be dead, I am going to live on through the character I had performed and the live *malancari* who perform the *Malanca* after me. That is why *Malanca* is like a sort of bridge that opens only for a few days when the dead and the living get together. So this is exactly the chain with its links that I've talked about in the beginning" (Gheorghe Gherman, 28 years old, Crasna village, Krasnoyilsk in Ukrainian language, Ukraine, January 11, 2017, Interview).

I have met all these explanations in one form or another to the locals from Heleşteni, Ruginoasa and the other villages in Romania where I conducted my research. However, they have never been as clearly expressed as in the interview with Gheorghe. Every time I did not understand the meaning of some aspects of the mummers' plays that seemed absurd or meaningless, and I asked my interlocutors what it might mean, they answered me with just one word: *băşcălie*. In the Romanian language, this word means to make fun of something, but the meanings given by the locals to this term went beyond this simple explanation. *Băşcălie* meant in their view a mockery of all the problems of the peasant world by mummers' plays, even those considered stringent or impossible to be solved.

Through these plays, the rural community proves its vitality and power to transcend, at least temporarily, the daily realities, however burdensome they may be. Unfortunately, "play [together with the values surrounding it, I would add] was, for the most part, left out of this critical project as anthropology on this issue stayed firmly within the modern tradition... and [t]he analysis of social activities, such as games, that are associated with play were dwarfed in scale by treatments of work" (Malaby 2009:205-206). This statement, made by one of the most important anthropologists of play, goes hand in hand with my demonstration from the beginning of the next chapter where I show that most of the anthropological studies, especially those related to the economic anthropology of Marxist influence, depicted the peasant as a simple economic agent often crushed under the weight of cumbersome rules and laws imposed by superordinate instances and more powerful people.

Probably this is why the most important thinkers who have had a major influence on cultural anthropology, and on scholars who conceived peasants mostly as economic agents, were those whom philosopher Paul Ricoeur has masterfully described by the term "masters of suspicion": Nietzsche, Freud and Marx (Ricoeur 2008). These thinkers, together with Foucault (who had also used and adopted 'the masters of suspicion' metaphor) (Foucault 1990), reduced social realities to the immanence of some power relations in which political-

economy, domination, and "will to power" (Nietzsche 2017) played the main role. Certainly, such analyses contain valuable information and rely more often on a diligent hermeneutic effort, but they risk losing sight of the key aspects of the human being who has lived for thousands of years in agricultural communities, and thus ended up offering an essentially truncated image of the peasantry. Perhaps it is no coincidence that neither Foucault, nor the *masters of suspicion* were 'field anthropologists', seeking to understand the peasants' system of values from inside, as well as the methods through which rural communities had been able to transgress the immanence of the everyday world with all its problems, anxieties and tensions.

The same may be the reason why the humanist project of Kant from his *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* was never taken into account by Cultural Anthropology or Peasant Studies when analyzing peasantry. The philosopher from Königsberg was the thinker who showed that, by morality or by a privileged aesthetic sense such as the sublime, human beings could exceed the iron laws of causality and earn their freedom as rational agents, placing themselves in the horizon of transcendence where they could contemplate themselves and their society as a whole (together with all its problems and pressures) independent of nature and its causal laws:

[T]he irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of and a superiority over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us, where by the humanity in our persons remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that domination. In this way, in our esthetic judgment nature is judged as sublime not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power (which is not part of nature) to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health and life) as trivial... (Kant 2001).

For Gheorghe as well as for other folk plays practitioners, the mummings meant, besides many other things, the possibility of a feeling of sublime that offers the opportunity to transcend all the problems of the peasant world and the boundaries of village community's moral and physical universe.

## **F. Conclusions**

In this chapter I presented mummers' plays in relation to the system of values of rural communities. Especially in the past, when most of these rural communities were still very cohesive, mummers' plays were an important component of the mechanism that made the rural system of values work. Mummers were a way of solving inevitable problems of the peasant universe and, in the meantime, by irony and persiflage, they could also become a chance to transcend the burdensome difficulties of rural communities - a way to face the defying and devaluing perspectives that superordinate classes had on peasants. All these complex aesthetic experiences and subtle answers to the devaluing attempts stemmed from outside their communities shed a different light on peasants, unlike that displayed by most social science studies. These researchers analyzed peasants especially as economic agents in a certain mode of production or just from the perspective of the opposite relations with their superordinate classes. Pamela Leonard and Deema Kanef seized this aspect well:

Unfortunately, there are many scholars and policy-makers who continue to reduce peasant behavior to little more than an attempt to gain resources and strategies for economic survival, without considering how economic relations are shaped by family and community ties, political interests, environmental concerns, aesthetic tastes, desire for long-term stability or religious commitments (Leonard and Kanef 2001:28).

The narrow vision of a significant part of rural studies about the person in agricultural societies is also a symptom of the peasant's devaluation, together with the type of humanity peasants embodied. This attitude, embodied by the Marxist concepts of class struggle, mode of production, labor and class, blocked the way to understanding peasants and their social universe in a larger and deeper perspective, morally and axiologically. Unlike other studies, various realistic writers like Władysław Reymont, Marin Preda, Leo Tolstoy, Liviu Rebreanu, George Sturt and many others promoted a much more complex image of peasants, including their problems as social class, but also their aesthetic aptitudes and their social life's complexity. Precisely because of that, Kant's theory on the sublime, Hartman's theory of good and Kluckhohn's theory on values and action give us a richer perspective in sight on understanding mummers' plays and their relation to the peasants' system of values than the numerous sociological theories of Marxist inspiration who tried to understand peasants only from a political-economy perspective.

The parallel between mummers' plays and the rural system of values sheds a new light on the aesthetic and social life of the individual in agricultural societies - societies influenced by external factors, too, but revolving for a long period of time mainly around the values and norms of that particular community. Inside these cultural micro-ecosystems, the peasant's aesthetic and cultural life was not devoid of dynamism and change. On the contrary, it has always been subjected to internal and external challenges that prove this universe's dynamism and diversity. In this context, far from being a reversal of the social order, mummers' plays are subjected to strict rules and principles, being in fact an expression of important values from the system of values of the rural world.

This approach can reveal the history of the mummers' plays and their practitioners, the peasants: the people without history. And, these are "the people without history" not because they are those "to whom history has been denied" but because important aspects of their history have been, for a long time, ignored.

One of the basic ideas of this chapter is that mummers' plays may be regarded as lenses through which the history of rural communities in Europe and other sides of the globe could be read. In this history, one may find more conservative times - when changes happened slowly and gradually - but also very dynamic ones such as the postsocialist era when the transformations affecting peasantry were rapid and drastic, eroding the rural world system of values from its foundation.

Paradoxically, mummers' plays and other rural rituals, too, may differ significantly from what one finds even in neighboring villages. After having researched these rural cultural forms in Mexico throughout her career, Lourdes Arizpe speaks about *micro-regions* with similar practices, but also about *contrast marks* between rituals in neighboring villages. All these are signs of rivalry between neighboring villages, and make the villagers "feel they belong to their larger cultural circle while at the same time maintaining their singularity" (Arizpe 2013). The subjects Arizpe's interviewed stated about themselves: "we do the same, but different"; their assertion speaks about the fact that such a ritual "does not fit neatly into the cultural classifications of general ethnographic grids applied by Folkloristic in many countries" (Idem 2013:28) as they are part of a "micro-regional tradition of plurality" (Arizpe 2013:28).

All these observations illustrate that an increasing number of the people in customary rural communities have spent the longest part of their life within the boundaries of their own

community where they have developed their own culture and norms, sometimes totally against the grain with the traditions of neighboring communities. But the system of values of these communities is similar because we are talking essentially about the values shared by people who had lived under the circumstances of the same type of economy - one based on agricultural labor. That could be one reason why we find strikingly similar mummers' plays separated by huge distances and time intervals. This morphologic, thematic and symbolic resemblance should not necessarily be interpreted as cultural diffusion, but rather as resemblance of cultural expressions of the customary community living within the same type of economy that defined its system of values over time.

My premise in this chapter was that understanding peasants system of values might shed light on the relation between peasants and mummers' plays in the stirring context of the postsocialist world. The postsocialist world is troubled by rapid changes and very diverse political, economic and social challenges. Still, the peasantry system of values is not easy to be dislocated. As Kluckhohn well observes, "Values are never immediately altered by a mere logical demonstration of their invalidity" (1951:400).

So we are talking about the clash between two distinct entities: on the one hand, the postsocialist world with its challenges and dynamism; on the other hand, the peasants' system of values formed over longer periods of time. "Value implies a code or a standard which had some persistence through time and organizes a system of action... and places things, acts, ways of behaving, goal of action on the approval-disapproval continuum", Kluckhohn also carefully observed (1951:395), noticing that the system of values of a community might become the last bastion of a rural community against mainstream culture. In this clash between two distinct worlds, observing mummers turned into an exceptional opportunity. Reading over the shoulders of the people whose culture I studied gave me the opportunity to observe the dilemmas and worries of the humans, living in a system of values that organized their thinking, actions and behavior for a long time. In the next chapter, I will discuss the fate of *Mummers' plays* had after the peasants' proletarianization and the transformation of rural culture under the influence of industrialization.

## CHAPTER V

### MUMMERS' PLAYS AS PEASANT COMMUNITY RITUALS

#### A. Introduction

This chapter introduces a series of arguments about the ethnographic and scientific relevance of research on mummers. The main focus is on analyzing *mummers' plays* as important cultural elements of peasant culture, and as compelling rituals for people who live in agricultural societies (Beeman 1993). At the same time, it focuses on the transformations of mummers' plays during the proletarianization of peasants and on the transition of peasant societies from a domestic mode of production based on small-scale agricultural work to an industrial mode of production. I attempt to answer two important questions that have concerned social scientists since the beginning of the research on mummers' plays. How could we explain the enormous diversity of mummers' plays across Europe and the amazing similarities between folk plays situated at huge distances in time and space? In the meantime, how could we explain the enormous success mummers had in agricultural societies for centuries, considering the mass extinction of mummers' plays with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution?

For many reasons, this attempt is difficult and risky. Firstly, the most influential studies on peasantry came from a Marxist perspective revolving around concepts like class struggle, mode of production and class consciousness (Malaby 2009). This vision made them less prone to regard the inhabitants of agricultural societies as keepers of a rich culture embedded with complex rituals around which the cultural life of community gravitated.

Secondly, most literature concerning mummers' plays has not analyzed these cultural forms as essential cultural components of rural and village customary communities, but rather as autonomous units, focusing on the texts of the plays itself and not on the community performing it and its relation with these rituals (Bogatyrev 1998; Glassie 1975). Many other studies on mummers' plays were concerned with arguments about the definition of the terms that describe these rituals (T. A. Green 1978; Burson 1980), the establishment of a certain origin of these customs (Ordish 1891; Chambers 1969) and eventually the creation of a typology that all these forms of culture could fit in (Beatty 1906; Schmidt 1965; Cawte, Helm, and Peacock 1967).



Thirdly, the depeasantization of the last decades (Araghi 1995) had profound effects on peasant customary communities, including the progressive dissolution of the social networks responsible for the transmission and practice of folk plays. Therefore, these cultural forms are currently scarcer or different even from those performed a few decades ago.

Choosing as a site of my field research eastern Romania, a location with a strong peasant culture even today, allowed me to study peasants, and trace research questions in a new way. Eastern Romania still belongs to the most ruralized areas in Europe (E. J. Hobsbawm 1994), where the peasant customary community may still be found, especially in some villages and *comune* that lie far from the urban centers surrounding them. In this area, village communities are not organized as a chain of small-scale agricultural farms or as a network of small local farmers. These communities revolve around certain economic and moral values different from those of the capitalist market economy based on profit and efficiency (Polanyi 1944).

In order to describe the phenomena and the processes mentioned above, I divided this chapter into three sections. The first section describes the dynamic of the concept of peasant in disciplines like anthropology, sociology and other related fields, and explains the conditions that prevented community rituals, including mummers' plays, from being one of the fundamental elements in defining and analyzing peasantry throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The second section discusses mummers and the literature of the social sciences tackling them since the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a short history of mummers' plays in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also the foundation for explaining the course of mummers' plays during the period when the communities performing them went through the most dramatic transformations in their history. These were the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution that affected peasant communities in multifarious ways: economically, politically and culturally. This section is also a preparation for the theory released in the last part of the chapter. Examining the trials and stumbling blocks of researchers who had attempted to provide theories and explanations on mummers' plays is a revealing set of examples indicating both fruitless methods and irrelevant hypotheses in the analysis of mummers' plays. Last but not least, they point to the scientific roads that lead to dead ends.

In the third section, I launch my own theory of mummers' plays, explaining at the same time why these customs had been regarded from a perspective much different than the one I tried to promote at the end of this chapter using theories on plays and games. Inside this

section, I define mummers' plays in relation to the European peasantry that has been 'a large cultural ecosystem' comprising the great majority of Europeans until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and had also guaranteed the cultural practice and transmission of the folk plays along many generations. I supported my arguments using Couliano's theory on *mind games* (1992), Wittgenstein's *language game theory* (2001[1953]), Huizinga's theory on *homo ludens* (Huizinga 1968[1938]), Lienard and Boyer's theory on *collective ritual and evolved human cognitive architecture* (Liénard and Boyer 2006), as well as Sartori's critical theory on *multi-media and cyber-space* (Sartori 2005).

## **B. The Representation of Peasants in Social Sciences**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, peasants represented an engaging topic for anthropology, sociology, folklore, history, political science, but also for literature, art, theater and cinema. Today, the amount of books, studies, research and movies focusing on peasants, their life and society is absolutely impressive and impossible to sum up within a single comprehensive work. In order to create laws and policies necessary to solve the problems of this social class, politicians on all sides of the political spectrum and across all continents became aware that they have to understand peasantry and its evolution under the pressure of the changes created by industrialism and the infusion of capital in the rural world. Despite this special political interest and concern and the complex and diverse research outcome produced in various fields, it is still impossible to state that a universally valid definition of peasantry has been found; the same thing stands true for a comprehensive set of laws that could solve the peasants' problems and concerns. Probably the large number and the incredible cultural diversity of the small-scale land workers on the planet were the main reasons why defining and understanding peasantry, as well as policymaking dedicated to this social class met a series of unbeatable obstacles, visible even now in disciplines trying to address its social, moral, economic and spiritual profile (Halperin 1977). Besides all these, the emergence of new political movements such as socialism and nationalism, each with its own ideology, after the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the formation of European national states after the disintegration of the large European empires, were also responsible for the conceptual and ideological hindering of a rigorous understanding and definition of peasantry (Shanin 1971; Drace-Francis 2013).

One of the most influential traditions that marked the history of rural studies and the definition of peasantry was Marxism. In his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political*

*Economy*, Marx defines peasantry as a mode of economic production that determines a way of thinking and, finally, human consciousness – a consciousness defined in relation to the economic environment and the labor performed by the individual in a certain context and historical time (Marx 1904). Coming from a similar perspective, Klaus Kautsky's work *On the Agrarian Question* wonders what the political consequences of capitalist transition were for the rural world dominated by peasants (Kautsky 1988). The answer to this question concerns both the destiny of peasantry as social class, and its possible political-economic position, next to the revolutionary proletarian class or to the capital owners (the agricultural capital included). Agricultural economists Alexander Chayanov and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky whose most important works date back to the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, follow the same marxist tradition. They had also tried to understand the fate of peasantry, predicting – more or less realistically – its evolution in time simultaneous to the development of capital and capitalist relations in the countryside (Chayanov 1991; Preobrazhensky 1967). This type of polemic reflections existed not only in Russia and Western Europe, but also in almost all areas around the globe that had a significant peasant class. Therefore, the list of thinkers that had defined peasantry in Marxist terms and used a *class struggle* and a *mode of production* filter to define peasantry is incredibly rich and diverse, and found on all continents.

Another orientation originates in Durkheim's thought and, from the perspective of a vision based on the *modern-traditional* dualism, identifies the ambiguous position of peasantry, as a society that displays traditional elements and is simultaneously closely linked to the urban world (Shanin 1971:14). Due to this *half-traditional – half-modern* ambiguity, Robert Redfield named peasants using the syntagm *part-societies* (Redfield 1969) and Eric Wolf by calling them “neither primitive nor modern” (E. Wolf 1966). Obviously, this perception of peasants stems from the modernization theory built upon the positivist premise of societies evolving from simple and primitive to complex and modern.

Michael Kearney, the author of one of the most complex studies on peasantry, tells us that western anthropology discovered the peasant during the modern age of the discipline, between 1950 and 1960 (Kearney 1996:39). This was the decade when anthropologists observed a remarkable decline of tribal, primitive societies. They had worked as reference points to compare modern societies and modern people to something totally different, within a dual logic such as *Us vs. Others*. Thus, for a while, peasants took the place of primitives and embodied the otherness in a comparative evolutionary discourse (Wolf 1966:1). Yet, as they had always been perceived as ambiguous, placed somewhere between modernity and

traditionalism, they could never completely replace the anthropology's discourse about 'the primitive' (Kearney 1966:23). This could be the reason why the rich anthropological literature about the rituals of tribal societies in Africa, South America, Asia or North America, could not find correspondence in peasant studies, although this exercise would have been extremely productive for understanding and defining peasants on a basis different from the strictly economic or class one.

Moreover, the anthropological paradigms that tried to realize a general outline of peasantry after the 1960s were economic anthropology – mainly represented by George Dalton – and historical materialism – promoted primarily by Claude Meillassoux, Maurice Godelier and Emmanuel Terray. Both schools were strongly influenced by Marxism, Structuralism and Historical Materialist Dialectics. Adopting this vision when defining peasants had to do with understanding the economic relations of peasantry as social class, thus regarded only from the perspective of the history of its subordination by other social groups, therefore of the evolution of relations of production as result of the relations and conflicts between social classes (Dalton 1971). From this point of view, “[f]or communities without written record, economic anthropology serves as economic history of village organization and performance before development and industrialization seriously began” (Dalton 1967). For Meillassoux, an important representative of historical materialism, the peasant relations of production “grow from the economic constraints of agricultural activities and around the need for reproduction of the productive unit” (Meillassoux 1973) which is, in fact, the peasant family itself.

Sociologists and anthropologists concerned with understanding peasants from a larger perspective, tried to arrange this complex landscape of tendencies and movements that centered on peasants and peasantry's problems. Sociologist Teodor Shanin, one of the most influential researchers in the history of rural studies, identified at least two more distinct orientations, apart from the Marxist tradition (1971:13-14). The most visible one is represented by European ethnography, and is linked to a nationalist vision related to the construction of national states in Europe. From this perspective, the peasants on the territory of various newly formed states were believed to incarnate the essence of the new nations of Europe, following the collapse of the big European empires: the Spanish Empire, the Second French Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. “From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until the Second World War, a parallel research tradition developed in Eastern Europe. It was concerned with

studying the peasants of one's own society, and was not linked to colonial empires but to emerging nationalisms", Halpern, an American anthropologist with strong interest in Eastern Europe and rural culture, also stated (Halpern 1976).

Unfortunately, this direction of study has been shaded by the nationalist political ideology that conceived rituals, customs and peasant communities' traditions by means of certain typologies and classifications that allowed little freedom of analysis. From the national folkloristics perspective, these typologies and classifications expressed something of the essence and the spirit of a nation formed under certain geographical-historical conditions, throughout many centuries, rather than something of the culture of a local rural community born in a specific economic, political and social micro-ecosystem. Guided by nationalist principles, this vision failed, too, in its attempt to understand scientifically the peasants' rituals and their customs when related to the social-economic universe and the rural communities' institutions, as well as to the spiritual and cultural needs of individuals formed within a peasant society.

This orientation became visible especially in Central and Eastern Europe where the construction of the nation-states faced, from its very beginning, what was appropriately described by the frequent syntagm of *problema țărănească/peasantry issue*. The peasantry issue went hand in hand with the development of rural studies and ethnography in this area. Shanin himself admitted that "the systematic study of peasantry originated in Central and Eastern Europe; not surprisingly, because in those societies a rapidly 'Westernizing' intelligentsia was faced by a large peasantry – the poorest, most backward and numerically the largest section of their nations" (Shanin 1971:11). Thus, this systematic study was the equivalent of a strongly ideologized vision where the discovery of the 'national spirit of people' in a certain region intertwined with the processes of rural culture's patrimonialization and the creation of local folklore archives dominated by detailed ethnographic descriptions of what was considered by local folklorists as representative for the essence of rural life and the embodiment of the people's national spirit.

In this respect, Romania could be regarded as a case study because, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a series of cultural-political trends emerged, revolving around the *peasantry issue* (*problema țărănească*), the right understanding of peasantry as social class, and its definition within a new type of political entity – namely the national state. *Poporanism* (*being on the people's side*) founded by Romanian lawyer and journalist Constantin Stere in 1890, having

taken its inspiration from the *Russian Narodniks* – a current that had emerged not long before in Russia. Stere's *poporanism* regards Romanian rural civilization as a sign of genuineness and social cohesion, a quintessential expression of the Romanian people, opposed to an urban culture considered to be imported, inauthentic and heterogeneous. Thus, the main goal of the intellectual elites was to fulfill their duty in front of the masses mostly represented by peasants and their social-economic problems. Another trend addressing the understanding and solving of the peasants' problems was *Sămănătorismul*, founded by the outstanding historian and politician Nicolae Iorga around the *Great Peasants' Revolt of 1907*. Bearing a nationalistic tone, *Sămănătorismul* (*sowing ideas*) asks for specific attention to national education – a process regarded as a solution for the cultivation and emancipation of peasantry. While peasants are considered to incarnate the country's traditions, the village appears as a source of traditions and customs depicting the authentic people's spirit. Besides these idyllic notes, this current embedded certain ethnic folklore-centered nationalistic elements where the peasants' migration to the city was regarded as an alienating and displacing experience. In similar terms, peasants were perceived from a Marxist perspective as an exploited class whose fruits of labor fed other social categories such as landlords, unscrupulous merchants and venal politicians.

Finally, another trend dating back this time to interwar Romania, was *Țărănismul* (*Peasantism*), with a program advocating for peasantry and its well-being. In the vision of the *Țărănism*, rural economy was distinct from the economic structures and relations generated by capitalism. Because of this, it had to be protected by the intrusion of capital that could have destroyed its authenticity and basic principles – all of which were inherently non-capitalist. The main promoter of these ideas was the economist Virgil Madgearu who explained the principles of *Țărănism* in his substantial work *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism* published in 1936 (Madgearu 1936). Of course, all these local tendencies echoed international events, trends and ideas, given the fact that debates on peasantry and its problems were an important topic in political-economic circles by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This brief summary of the tendencies noticed in the research on peasantry in Romania is perhaps an eloquent example of the big political-ideological confrontations during the period mentioned above. But this is probably just a small piece of the vast landscape comprising local studies on peasantry.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, in the American anthropology, authors like Robert Redfield and James C. Scott, described peasants in a more meaningful way from the

perspective of their values and of the moral principles they had acquired while living in small communities based on land work and reciprocal relations. Nevertheless, this vision, too, engendered the idea of peasantry as a subordinated class, a fact that results clearly from Scott's assertion that "the poor had the social right to subsistence" (Scott 1977) – considered one of the principles around which peasant communities revolved. This perspective turned once again the research on peasantry into a case study for the Marxist class struggle. This was possible because they had been mainly perceived from a class perspective, regarded as embracing the fight against exploiters whenever their essential right to subsistence had been infringed. We thus notice that even these more detailed perspectives on peasants bear the marks of the modernization theory and of the Marxist class struggle theory.

Following this brief presentation of some of the current tendencies in peasant studies, it becomes obvious that most of these visions have neither privileged the understanding of peasantry from the perspective of *mummers' plays*, nor included inside their definition the concept of *customary community* as representative for the peasants' identity.

A dimension of this often forgotten universe could be identified in the peasants' inclination towards "the play element" (Huizinga 1968) in all its forms and manifestations. This trend has been analyzed and identified in peasant communities only by few researchers, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin being probably the most well-known name in this category (Bakhtin 1984). Thus, *mummers' play* is an expression of this universe and is traceable throughout all Europe and Russia (Warner 1977), Asia (Tillis 1999), Northern Africa (Ebewo 2001), Canada (Jarvis 2014), America (Nissenbaum 1988). For all these rural communities, based on householding economies and autarky (Polanyi 2001 [1944]:59), play was one of the essential elements of social coexistence, employed for expressing joy, happiness, agreement but also satire, worries, disagreement, conflicts – a meaningful way to transcend difficulties and daily problems and, in the meantime, a complex way of communicating all kind of human feelings and emotions (Gunnell 2007b).

Michael Kearney, one of the researchers who have studied peasants by means of a historical-ethnographic approach, field research and the analysis of the peasant economies in relation with globalization, also emphasized the neglect of the aesthetic values and rituals of the peasantry by most of the peasant studies, despite that fact that such approach would be necessary for understanding a reconceptualized peasantry:

My evaluation of peasant studies is that they tend to dwell too much on either economics or culture and as such are unable to move forward on the problems they have set themselves – for example, analysis of development, ritual, symbolism, resistance, and differentiation. All of these issues are at the same time economic and cultural, and their reconceptualization requires a theoretical synthesis as is enabled by the theory of generalized value, which allows us to query the unity and transformations of economic and aesthetic values and how they become inscribed as the identities of persons who produce, lose, consume, and transform them and who in doing so become constituted and, on occasions, themselves transformed (Kearney 1996:12).

Unfortunately, visions that have analyzed peasantry together with its aesthetic dimension and its system of values are rare. Generally, peasant studies are undermined by a severe blindness that made it impossible to understand peasants from a perspective broader than the political-economic one, a fact connected to yet another tendency that Huizinga identified at a global scale. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, he stated, are known for an over-evaluation of the economic factor, turning it into a main focus both for rationalist and utilitarian philosophies, and for the bipolar couple liberalism-socialism. Together with the directions they instilled in understanding mankind, from a strictly materialistic perspective, these tendencies created the premises for the marginalization of the playful dimension in human society or, more often, for turning it into a commercial activity by introducing it into the economic circuit by means of the promotion of sport performances in mass culture to the detriment of communities' forms of play (Huizinga 1968[1938]). Thus we are witnessing today the preservation of only certain sides of the multiple phenomena and manifestations of what Huizinga called *the ludic*. One of these phenomena was the competition element that gained ground in front of *the masquerade, the carnivalesque and the burlesque* – in one word, the spontaneous folk creativity. This creativity is what Bakhtin and other Russian linguists such as Zelenin, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Bogatyrev and Propp described by means of the opposition between the lower strata of culture and the high culture dressed as official mainstream culture – authoritarian, standardizing and levelling both socially and intellectually (Pomorska 1984). With this last remark, I move to the next section that analyzes folk plays through the authors who made the greatest contribution in this field of research.



## **C. A Short History of Mummers through the Eyes of Researchers Who Studied Them**

### **1. Issues and Inconveniences When Approaching Mummers' Plays**

As we have already seen, analyzing mummers' plays as a peasant ritual and from the perspective of rural studies encounters a whole series of inconveniences. The same situation is also found when it comes to folk play literature itself. This field of research has been undermined over time by a high number of methodological and conceptual issues that slowed down its development and evolution.

The first problem having arisen when proceeding in the study of *mummers' plays* is an historical one. The small rural communities performing these rituals started to be scientifically analyzed in a historic moment that coincided with their dissolution due to the integration into a new economic cycle, specific to the industrial revolution and the great economic, political and cultural transformations following it (Polanyi 1944). This new logic, inherent to modern and modern times, offered human beings new experiences and a type of approaching reality

which have gradually distanced people from many of the processes which affect their lives. This has been not just a distancing from their pasts, or their roots, but a distancing from the economic, political and cultural systems that influence, or even control their lives" (Walsh 1992).

Many of the authors who began to analyze *folk plays* lived in a time when the decline of rural communities because of the ever growing industrialization became part of daily reality. Thomas Fairman Ordish in his 1893 lecture entitled *English Folk-Drama*, held in the front of English Folk-lore Society members, is talking about "the traditions that have utterly died out in so many districts, but in other places where they have survived they become attenuated, and show an altogether feeble existence compared with what they were only a few years ago" (Ordish 1893). He showed his audience two dresses worn by English folk-players and a few photographs, and ended up urging his colleagues "to collect together all the fragments of folk-drama and dramatic custom which remain to us" (Idem 1893:150). This feeling of emergency, together with the fear that these folk customs would totally vanish, accompanied the first scientific studies on *folk plays*.

Outside this fear in front of the cultural arrest modernity could produce in the countryside, the field of folk plays literature has been initially developing in the same line

and direction with Anthropology. In Anthropology, a discipline that focused programmatically on the study of humans, the so-called formative period of the discipline coincided with the discovery of the “primitive” in tribal societies away from the European continent. This period was guided by an evolutionary approach, and some of its remarkable figures were Edward Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan and James George Frazer whose works became familiar even to ordinary readers. From their perspective, modern institutions expressed the social evolution from primitive and simple to modern and complex (Kearney 1996:26). This vision was to be felt in the *folk plays’ literature*, too, where *the mummers* were seen as some kind of survivors of bygone eras. It is an aspect Henry Glassie observed well. He was one of the first researchers to launch a well-grounded criticism against his predecessors who had studied these cultural forms, naming them with a word later adopted in *mummers’ studies* – “the survivalist”:

The prime concept of survivalist theorists of mumming has its source in Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and parallels the thinking of those scholars who locate the origin of all myth in ritual – an idea that fares miserably today. Once upon a time, we are told, there was a fertility ritual that efficiently structured the agricultural year by means of magical mimicry. Later day mumming is but an irrational fragment of this ritual, having drifted into modern times through the inertia of the peasant mentality (Glassie 1975:56).

To British *Folkloristics* and British *Theater Studies*, the research of mummers meant what investigating the primitive represented for anthropology; yet, this fields’ outcome was far from being as successful as the works of anthropologists like Frazer or Morgan. Nevertheless, mummers were perceived at first as a kind of ‘primitives from home’. Thus, the fact that the English were the first and the most tenacious examiners of the mummers’ plays confirms the assertions we have already mentioned – that the analysis of these rural rituals went hand in hand with the decline of community life forms under the pressure of modernity changes that had not yet been experienced by mankind until that moment. As it is well-known, England was the first country to undergo the great transformations of the industrial revolution, and its inhabitants were the first to lose the way the people of the past used to approach reality (Polanyi 1944). But the decline of certain forms of culture has not arrived alone; in exchange, it brought a sort of nostalgia (Lowenthal 1985) and an concern for the past and for its cultural forms as Walsh well remarked:

This new fleeting experience of life in the modern urban world demanded that the past be held onto, but as with all processes of modernization, the past became something which emerged as yet another form of institutionalized discourse, often articulated through the museum and the academy (Walsh 1992:3).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it should not surprise us that the primary tendency of the first researchers of folk plays – most of them English authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – was to go deep into the history of Europe in order to understand the origin of these rituals and the historical caprices that let them ‘survive’ precisely in a country - England - that went first through the radical changes brought by Industrial Revolution. Unfortunately, this kind of hermeneutic approach is haphazard and risky from a scientific point of view.

When British researchers such as Beaty (1906:292), Chambers (1933:206) and Dean-Smith (Dean-Smith 1958) tried to understand and to explain *ritual dramas* in England, Ireland and Scotland, they were always tempted to realize various comparisons with mummers’ plays from the Balkans. Other authors such as Douglas Kennedy (Kennedy 1949), Violet Alford (Alford 1962), Alex Helm (Helm 1969) and Gailey (Gailey 1969) got closer to the Carpathian area and compared the rituals of British mummers with the Romanian *Călușari* – a custom taking place during Whitsuntide especially in Southern Romania<sup>43</sup>. With a classical philology or theater history background, these researchers assumed that Eastern Europe could be a fruitful resource for drawing comparisons. Not surprising, yet unfortunately is the fact that they have never referred to winter rituals performed by Romanian peasants around Christmas and New Year such as *The Dance of the Deer/Jocul Cerbului*, *The Dance of the Goat /Jocul Caprei*, *Peasant Wedding/Nunta țărănească*, *Irozii*, *The New Year’s Great Plough/Plugul cel Mare de Anul Nou*, *The Small Horses/Căiuții*, *The Outlaws/Haiducii*, or other performances with mummers including the ones I described in the previous chapters of this work.

Had they known these rituals, the British researchers would have surely have drawn more comparisons than they did. The reason is that the plays mentioned above are, in matter

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<sup>43</sup> The fact that the ritual of *Călușari* was known to English authors needs to be explained. The ethnologist Bogdan Neagota stated that the ritual of *Călușari* was the most intensely patrimonialized Romanian custom, festivalized and staged since the 1930s during King Carol II’s ruling, when a group of *Călușari* was taken to London at an international festival (Rus & Neagota 2016). Whatever the explanations, one fact is obvious: a good knowledge of mummers’ plays in Eastern Europe and especially of those in Nordic countries (Gunell ed. 2007) would have spared the first British mummers researchers a series of quite gross comparisons and the launch of a series of speculations that were difficult to support.

of morphologic structure, topics and artistic dynamics, closer to English folk dramas like: *The Hero-Combat Play*, *The Sword Dance Play*, *The Wooing Play*, *Hunting the Wren*, *Saint-George Mummers' Play*, *The Bridal Play*, *The Plough Play* and so on. In addition, characters such as the *Horn Dancers*, the *Sword Dancers*, the *Hobby Horse*, the *Christmas Goat*, the *Christmas Tup* and the *Christmas Bull* from British folk plays are closer to the characters in folk dramas performed by Romanian peasants during Christmas and New Year such as *Irozii* (Sword Players), the *Goat*, the *Rams/Berbecii*, the *Bull/Boul*, the *Deer/Cerbul* and the *Small Horses/ Căiuții*.

In the absence of viable sources and the discovery of credible causal connections between different cultural forms separated by a long distance in time and space, the effort of English researchers to discover striking isomorphic relations between them remains a fascinating intellectual exercise but at the same time a futile work from a scientific point of view. This trend was subsequently exploited and explored through sharp criticism by some of the contemporary researchers of mummers (Millington 2002).

From this complex landscape derives the second problem encountered when proceeding to the study of *mummers' plays*. I called this issue a hermeneutical one because it is related to the nature of the old documents that mentioned *mummers' plays* before their systematic and scientific investigations.

The oldest documents concerning mummers' plays were created by amateurs (resulting for instance in travel notes, letters, journals, etc.) or by religious authorities that tried to suppress the plays in the name of Christian dogmas. In the meantime, all these documents could be described as nothing more than occasional notes, and therefore could not be defined as the result of a serious scientific effort or at least of careful observations. But, the paradox and the cunning of reason (Hegel 1975) regarding *mummers' plays* are still worth mentioning. Chiefly because of ecclesiastic interdictions against *mummers' plays*, most of the oldest information about them that we have today managed to reach us precisely through the documents issued by the authorities trying to suppress them.

The third problem encountered in the investigation of *mummers' plays* is due to the diversity of scientific orientations of the researchers who have dealt with these realities. The researchers that started to analyze *mummers' plays* come from various disciplines of social sciences such as folklore, theater studies, sociology and anthropology. In the previous paragraphs we used the expression *folk play literature*, but we should mention that this area

had never been acknowledged as an independent field of research, being rather a fallow piece of land than a farmland clearly demarcated. That is why the contributions regarding mummers come from such a diverse set of disciplines. Moreover, all these are based on distinct methodologies, and often have completely different agendas, goals, ideologies and manners of defining social realities; and, most often, there is no real dialogue between them. For the time being, I am going to give just two examples.

In her book about Russian folk theater – *The Russian Folk Theater* – published in 1977, Elizabeth A. Warner promotes the idea that, in Western Europe, folk theater could never equal the richness and diversity of folk Russian theater. Nevertheless, a comprehensive perspective on the contribution of British authors that studied folk plays – no matter they were English, Irish or Scottish – would have made her see the incredibly rich and diverse landscape that comes along with some trustworthy attempts to synthesize and systematize all the folk theater plays performed throughout England (Cawte, Helm and Peacock 1967:32).

Another eloquent example in this respect is Gerald Creed's recent work, *Masquerade and Postsocialism* (Creed 2011), where he analyzes the mummers in postsocialist Bulgaria. Despite the fact that the author uses repeatedly words such as "mummer" and "mummers", his work has little dialogue with the comparative literature on mummers. Because of this, Creed presents Bulgarian mummers on the canvas of postsocialism and the anthropological literature about the ritual that provide little help in building a broad view on the broader history of European mummers.

Despite these views and approaches, there were few diligent researchers who reviewed the contributions brought to this area of research. Following Alex Helm's efforts who reviewed contributions about mummers' plays in his 1968 work *The English Mummers' Plays*, published posthumously in 1981 (Helm 1981), certain authors have tried to realize an overall review of this literature or at least to start a dialogue with the previous contributions in the field. Among them, we could mention Alan Brody (Brody 1971), Ronald Hutton (Hutton 1996), as well as Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (Steve Roud and Jacqueline Simpson 2000). But one of the most elaborate projects in this respect belongs to Thomas Millington who practically dedicates a substantial part of his PhD thesis to a dialogue with the literature about mummers. Nevertheless, even attempts such as Millington's – to realize an exhaustive synthesis – could lose sight of certain valuable works about the mummers' plays, including Arthur Beaty's study from 1906 (Beaty, 1906), Elizabeth A. Warner's work

on Russian folk theater (Warner 1977) or Susan Pattison's appealing field study *The Antrobus Soulcaking Play: An Alternative Approach to the Mummers' Play* (Pattison 1977).

Indeed, after a meticulous analysis of mummers' literature, a comprehensive view of a heterogeneous picture made out of diverse scientific contributions emerges. It contains enough authors who focused their research strictly on mummers from a certain region or country; but most of them ignored a considerable amount of the previous research and proceeded to a rediscovery on their own of this vast area. All these conditions contributed to the slow development of the scientific literature about mummers, without intervals of spectacular growth or revolutionary authors who did rebuild the whole edifice of this field. Therefore, the sluggish history of the discipline has been well depicted by Thomas Millington in his PhD thesis, – an almost exhaustive review of the whole literature about mummers published up to 2002 (Millington 2002:13-56).

The fourth issue encountered in the investigation of *mummers' plays* is a conceptual one. None of the authors who studied *mummers' plays* was able to find a concept that would be broad enough to name the whole range of *mummers' plays*, and at the same time would be accepted by most of the authors conducting research in this field. Because of this, in texts that focus on the study of mummers, we can find various concepts naming this type of ritual, such as: *Mummers*, *Mummers' plays*, *Ritual Drama*, *Folk Plays*, *Folk Rituals*, *Folk Drama*, *Folk Theater*, *Folk Theater with Masks*, *Early Forms of Theater*, *Dramatic Games*, *Quack Doctor Plays*, *Forms of Heralding* or *Expressions of Masking*. Obviously, this situation is due to the enormous diversity of the above mentioned cultural forms that have been investigated or just mentioned by some researchers over time. Counting all these rituals and customs brings about an impressive number of social manifestations from various parts of Europe and the world that are difficult to reunite through a general view.

Analyzing this complex landscape I observed that the comparative, interregional and global research of mummers, doubled by a good knowledge of the related literature, gave the most relevant results. Works like Leopold Schmidt's *Le Théâtre Populaire Européen* (1965), Terry Gunnell's *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (2007) and Steve Tillis' elaborate work *Rethinking Folk Drama* (1999) are a good proof of this assertion. Relevant results also came out of monographies dedicated to an entire region, merging distinct perspectives and visions about the reality of mummers' plays, as proven by the 1969 publication of *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* edited by Herbert Halpert and G.M. Story. These successful

results show us that the general picture of mummers can be drawn through a painstaking exercise: a holistic view on *mummers' literature* accompanied by an ethnographic effort that reveal the thorough details of folk plays in a certain region or even community. This type of work has also provided the most articulated conceptual framework for the analysis of mummers' plays.

Having made this observation and taking into account the four issues mentioned above, in my analysis I rejected the idea of choosing an exclusive method, and I engaged into a more complex analysis – a diachronic-synchronic and comparative one, trying to use it for understanding and presenting both the history of mummers' plays and the ethnographic details of case studies that could lead to a deeper understanding of the panorama comprising all these phenomena. In my opinion, only the combination of synchronicity and diachrony – therefore an ethnographic-hermeneutical approach – could lead to the comprehension of the complex picture represented by mummers' plays. For describing these plays, I am mostly inclined to use the Romanian word *joc*, referring to these phenomena with the general expression *jocuri ale mascaților* (mummers' plays). From this perspective, the greatest advantage of Romanian language is that the word *joc* brings together a series of meanings and, depending on the context, could mean game, dance, play, pantomime, theater, but also a risky enterprise with an uncertain outcome. Moreover, a comprehensive perspective on the entire picture of mummers' rituals presents us various forms of folk theater, dances, songs, games, pantomime, tricks, risks, etc. Alternatively, and depending on the context, I am going to use other concepts licensed by different studies in this field. These include *mummers*, *mummers' plays*, *folk plays*, *folk dramas*, *rural rituals* or *rural customs*.

In the next section I am reviewing the main works in the field, observing them with a critical eye, appreciating the contributions of all the hard-working researchers whose efforts tried to shed light on a vast and fascinating area of human knowledge – namely *folk plays* – that proved to be well-protected over time by the 'thick armor' of the mummers. The following sections sketch a history of mummers' plays in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seen through the eyes of the thinkers who have tried to explain this phenomenon. Starting from Thomas Ordish, the first thinker who opened the doors to the study of mummers, I will go along with these authors across the entire Europe, but I will also stop by in a few other places on the globe. I will end this history with a couple of great names in the history of mummers' research. These are Horia Barbu Oprișan who had been researching folk plays in Romania for

five decades and Terry Gunnel, the author who produced the most important comparative study in the history of this field. The present history will be indispensable in trying to answer the two questions raised at the beginning of this section. Through the works of these authors, I find revealing facts about the mummers' history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in various countries and regions differentially affected by the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

## 2. The Originists/The Survivalists

Thomas Fairman Ordish was the first English folklorist interested scientifically in the mummers' plays. Born in 1855, Ordish published his most important works on folk drama by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1891, 1893). He was the first thinker to see the study of mummers as a new territory, autonomous and fascinating, worthy of exploration before the complete extinction of these cultural forms affected by modernity (1993:149-150). One of his first preoccupations was to look for the real cause of folk drama and to detach himself from the traditional British Folkloristics<sup>44</sup> represented by Hone (Hone 2017) and Sandys (Sandys William 1833) who just tried to trace the lineage of these performances from some older genres like mystery plays and miracle plays that were both performed during Middle Age. These earlier researchers included *folk plays* in theater genre originating in the so-called medieval dramas with religious subject encouraged and supported by the Christian church (namely the miracle and mystery plays). Finding a reference in the writings of a French medieval author, Ordish discovers that, in fact, miracle and mystery plays had been encouraged by the church precisely in order to “supersede the dancing, music, mimicry, and profane mummeries to which the folk were addicted” (Ordish 1891:317). This finding makes Ordish look for the origin of folk plays deeper into history.

Drawing parallels with the dramatic tradition in Ancient Rome, Greece and even India, Ordish concludes that English folk drama originates in pre-Christian times. But, due to innumerable influences during history – church's impact included –, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were presented in a form quite different from the initial one. For Ordish, for instance, the *Quack Doctor*, a frequent character in English folk theater, is actually a primitive shaman and magician who, influenced by modernity, finally puts on the doctor's clothes and turns from a serious and solemn character into a jester that brings about laughter. All these assumptions were difficult to prove and especially difficult to support because of the lack of documents validating the specific information, or of an extensive comparative

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<sup>44</sup> In the local academic tradition this field is called Folk Life Studies



approach. This does not mean they are meaningless, as we are going to see when we analyze the works of Romanian researchers of folk theater. Moreover, Ordish could not escape the pattern of understanding English folk dramas as nothing else than mere expressions of archaic theater plays – a fact that blocked his access towards other interpretations and directions of research. Thus, in Ordish' investigation we find a type of approach specific to late 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropology, bearing influences from both James George Frazer and the German folkloristics represented by Grimm brothers, themselves influenced by the Romantic nationalism that regarded folk cultural forms as archaic expressions of national literature and culture.

Only one decade after the publication of Thomas Ordish's main contributions on folk plays, the theater historian Arthur Beatty tried to give an explanation regarding mummers' plays, but limited his research to a single case study: *St. George Play*. Following the fashionable tradition of British folkloristics, Beatty expresses from the beginning of his study (1906:273) the programmatic goal of his research – to find the origin of mummers' plays. Unlike previous contributions, Beatty believes that the origin of these folk theater forms should be found in the realm of faith and the ceremonial (Beatty 1906:273). Further, he focuses his attention on *St. George Play*, and analyzes some dozens versions of it collected throughout the entire England, observing their extraordinary diversity from region to region and village to village. For this reason and following the classical trend of European folkloristics, he tries to establish a typology based on family similarities so that all these pieces could fit together, having in fact a common core (Idem 1906:276). Thus, he finds five elements that are common to all the versions of *St. George Play* that he analyzed: 1) the drawing of a circle around which actants perform; 2) the fight between two protagonists; 3) the idea of death and resurrection of one of the characters; 4) the characters' outfits frequently made out of masks and armours; 5) animal representations of certain characters through various masks and costumes. Beatty warns that the idea of death and resurrection is in fact the most important part of English folk drama as it is the central act of most of the plays.

Another insightful discovery of Beatty is that *St. George Play* performed by amateur peasants is in fact the work of a British author – William Smith – who wrote the play *St. George for England* around 1623. Although the manuscript was later destroyed and lost, it seems that the play had already been performed many times, and had become kind of famous, being borrowed by English folks and staged in an amateur style. Despite this discovery,

Beatty observes that there are elements of the folk play *St. George* that are traceable in other plays of British folk theater and even in other European cultures. This is why he states that literary sources cannot explain the origin of the play, but that it “may be explained by a reference to the people – the folk themselves (Idem 1906:321).” Following this statement, Beatty launches a comparative exercise where he shows that the central event of the play – the death and the resurrection of one of the characters – is spread all over Europe, and could be found even in primitive societies in Africa or aboriginal tribes in Australia. All these observations make Arthur Beatty state that the origin of English folk theater plays is an initial act of *mimesis magic* that was later dramatized and then perpetuated by the conservative mentality of the peasant and the rural communities (Idem 1906:321).

With this assertion, Arthur Beatty fits perfectly the direction of thinking of his epoch where the discourse about a primitive alter-ego went hand in hand with the discovery of the past and of origins lost in the mist of time. This type of discourse developed for a while on the line of the formative age of Anthropology, a period that the discipline surpassed during the first decade of the 20th century (Kearney 1996:26). But the studies about mummers have not moved beyond this phase, and this type of discourse continued and continues even today under various forms within the folk literature about mummers, despite important contributions that tried to change this paradigm starting with the late 1960s. As a result, although converging for a certain interval, anthropology literature and literature about mummers followed distinct paths, especially after the Second World War. Anthropology improved its discourse and methodology, whereas the literature on mummers went on along the same beaten track – that of finding the origins of mummers’ plays – and thus advanced slowly, without notable changes. For this reason I am now going to present the evolution of this field, mentioning only the main works of the most famous researchers.

Reginald J.E. Tiddy is considered to be an important figure in the literature about mummers, and his book *The Mummers’ Play*, published posthumously in 1923, is regarded as a notable contribution to understanding the concept of mummer (Tiddy 1923). Indeed, having a good knowledge of rural life and traditions, Tiddy managed to collect diligently a series of folk plays from 33 different regions of England – a truly remarkable effort. Living for a long time in the countryside, Tiddy was convinced that the plays he collected were created only by peasants, although “the modern survival of peasantry is a fair representative of the folk that made traditional poetry and drama (Idem 1923:65).” As a continuation of this idea, he apprehended that “the really living peasant communities” were totally different in the past

then those affected by modernity and studied by him before World War One. This observation regarding peasants made Tiddy conceive mummers' plays as degenerate elements of older folk plays that looked completely different in the past. Taking into consideration the decline of rural rituals such as mummers' plays, Tiddy describes the plays of his time as cultural elements "surviving" in a present that is different today from the time they had been staged over the centuries.

Perhaps this vision, next to his philology background, is what made him doubt the origin of this type of drama, alternating between the hypothesis that these folk theater plays had borrowed materials from mystery plays, moralities or more recent forms of drama, and the idea that these literary creations borrowed elements from the peasants' folk theater. Yet, Tiddy concluded that even in the degenerate form of contemporary plays, one could find the origin of this type of folk theater – an origin that was religious and pre-Christian, connected to vegetation deities and fertility cults, all of which were recurring elements in ancient Greek literature. The figure of Beelzebub, the devil, made the English philologist doubt a few times, because the character seemed to be attached artificially to the plays it appeared in. Therefore, Tiddy perceived it as a more recent creation compared to the other characters that fit better into the logic structure of the play (Ibidem 1923:78). Another big dilemma was caused by the transvestite, an ambiguous character who was both woman and man, and whom the philologist considered a loan from another folk theater play – *The Wooing Play* – or from an older marriage ritual (Ibidem 1923:78).

The same dilemma regarding the wooing elements appearing in some folk plays in England is largely explained by professor C.R. Baskervill in a text published in 1924 (Baskervill 1924). An eminent scholar, Baskervill brings decisive arguments for including the so-called *Wooing Play* in the category of *Mummers' Plays*, which had that far not been considered as part of the folk theater category. Nevertheless, Baskervill, too, considers that the wooing motif represents an element surviving from a pagan rite vanished long ago. This way, he aligns to the same tradition of the literature about mummers that regards them as survivors of extinct cultural forms. Another theory belonging to Baskervill states that the motif of death and resurrection from many plays of English folk theater would actually be an antithesis between *young* and *old* – symbolizing the replacement of the old year with the new one.

Although the first proposition was generally largely accepted in the literature about mummers, one could not say the same thing about the second one – the one concerning the symbolism of death and resurrection. It was contested by one of the most prestigious and diligent authors of the first four decades of the 20th century: Sir Edmund Chambers (Chambers 1933:233). However, for me as a researcher of folk theater in Romania, this whole debate represents a false dilemma. The reason is that, in many villages where I have conducted research, the death and resurrection of the Deer from the play bearing its name would actually be the symbol of the old year's death and the new one's arrival – an essential idea in the magical-archaic cosmogony of the peasants I interviewed in Iași region. Back to Edmund Chambers and his contributions, we could say that, without being an original thinker, he managed to synthesize – especially in *The English Folk-Play*, the work he published in 1933 – a series of motifs already debated in the literature about mummers before him. By comparing plays belonging to English mummers to those belonging to ancient Thracians, to rituals in the Balkans and Ancient Greece, to medieval theater and to folk dramas in the Basque Country, Chambers tries to establish the idea that there must have been a common pattern of mummers' plays, and that it could now be found in corrupt or deteriorated forms such as the English peasant folk plays of his time. Following this exegesis, he concludes that the various plays of folk theater in England have different origins: “My own impression is that it is safest to regard the divergence of the Plough Play from the ordinary type of Mummers' Play as due to the merging of the traditional ludus-motive of Death and Revival with an independent Wooing Play of later origin” (Chambers 1933:235).

In spite of these individual exegetic efforts, it was not the English researchers who produced the first truly substantial comparative study of mummers' plays. This first extended comparative approach belongs to continental European folkloristics. It is represented by the comparative study edited by Austrian folklorist Leopold Schmidt, entitled *Le Théâtre Populaire Européen* and published in French. Schmidt managed not only to compare the plays pertaining to folk drama in a certain country with others of the same kind from various areas of Europe, but also to reunite a mixed team of researchers from no less than 13 European countries. All of them contributed to an impressive 500 pages long volume, part of the series of works edited by the Council of Europe and dedicated to folk customs in Europe. Each article of the volume comprises a brief explaining and interpreting text in French, followed by the original manuscript of the form of theater analyzed, in the language of the country it had been taken from, endorsed by a French translation. Leopold Schmidt observes

that “the European folk theater” had not been studied consistently throughout Europe, some countries having laborious researches in the field, whereas in others the study of these cultural forms presented many inconsistencies (Schmidt 1965:11). The volume Schmidt edited tries to abolish these gaps by bringing together texts from different countries located almost all over Europe. This is why countries such as Switzerland, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Austria, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, England, Belgium, Greece and Turkey are part of the picture. Regrettably, none of the Eastern European countries, nor Russia, are included, despite the fact that – Schmidt admits – these areas display a live and dynamic tradition of European folk theater. In Schmidt’s opinion, this tradition is still different from the one in Western Europe because of the Orthodox religion of the Eastern European countries. This motivation is quite weak and contradicted by big exceptions including Poland.

Schmidt and most of the authors of the volume starts their analysis from a narrow vision stating that these forms of culture are just expressions of *European folk theater* and nothing more. This assumption is supported by a strenuous philological hermeneutical effort that reveals the similitude between recent expressions of European folk theater and oldest forms of the European theater, including the tradition of Christian descent of dramatizing biblical motifs, the itinerant theater and the medieval carnival traditions, Commedia dell’arte, etc. Despite the basic idea of finding the origin and the common features of these forms of European folk theater, the texts used as examples display a huge diversity of artistic and folkloric manifestations, ranging from English mummers’ plays to Belgian puppet theater, and from religious plays to secular ones. Confronted with this extraordinary diversity, the Austrian researcher felt obliged to arrange all the mentioned material in a more manageable order. Thus he accomplished a quite artificial classification of the whole material, dividing it into three categories presented in the contents of the volume: *Plays Belonging to Popular Customs*, *Plays on Christian Subjects*, and *Plays on Subjects Taken from Popular Literature*. Nevertheless, while reading, we notice that other contributors tend to offer alternative classifications, adding other categories than the ones initially proposed: play-like social customs, secular and religious processions, parlor plays, market plays, strolling-company plays, puppet shows, annual festivals, and narrative performances. Unfortunately, these classifications are rough and cannot solve the problem at all – namely the explanation and comprehension of the diversity of these folk culture forms, as the voices criticizing this work well observed (Litto 1968). Probably the reason why authors cannot agree to use a single concept for naming this whole series of cultural phenomena is the same. Although Schmidt

always uses the syntagm of “European folk theater” – used in the title of the work, too –, other authors of the volume use other names, some of which were already consecrated, such as that of “mummers’ play” and “folk theater”, but also others less used – for instance “carnavalesque plays” and “dramatic plays”.

Despite the inconsistencies in Schmidt’s book, his accomplishment of the first great comparative effort to analyze folk theater somehow anticipated the publication – four decades later – of another study, similar in terms of comparative approach, but much more complex as methodology and manner of approaching the analyzed realities. I am talking about the volume edited by Terry Gunnell about the mummers’ plays in Nordic countries that we are going to detail in the next sections of this chapter (Gunnell 2007). Unfortunately, Schmidt’s volume remains for the time being one of the old-style analyses still obsessed to explain the origin and the roots of these forms of “European folk theater”.

Intriguingly enough, until nowadays, at the dawn of the 21st century, the most debated topic in the literature about mummers concerns the origin of these folk dramas. Of course, there are works that bring interesting apprehensions regarding the various aspects of these popular plays, but these contributions are somehow auxiliary to the long lasting debate about the origin of mummers.

Alex Helm’s well-known work – *The English Mummers-Play*, finished in 1969 and published posthumously in 1981 – belongs to this category, although his analysis is more laborious and his methodology more sophisticated. He also makes a series of observations that make him one of the most talented researchers in this field. One of the first observations in this book is that English folk theater contains a series of absurd elements that disconcert the viewer and that make no sense when retold or described. In exchange, the atmosphere created by the mummers’ play is the one making a difference and seducing the audience: “This atmosphere cannot be transmitted on paper, it must be experienced physically during a performance before the sense of age, magic and mystery, all caught up together, can be felt” (Helm 1981:1).

Alex Helm was not only a great folklorist, but also a diligent fieldworker that witnessed tens of such ceremonies during his life. This is why he was one of the few researchers who understood well the reasons of the limited success that the literature about mummers had. He is also the one making the difference between the mummers’ plays

performed in the street or in the people's courtyards and households, and the mummers' plays that are staged as a result of a patrimonial effort. The English folklorist believed that the mummers brought on stage do not have too much to offer precisely because of the absurd elements of the plays that only become meaningful due to the interaction between actants and spectators – an interaction that disappears when the representations are transferred on stage:

Furthermore, the use of a stage is foreign to the Mummers. They need a space, nothing more. The space is kept clear by their forming a semicircle in which the action takes place, and round them and their audience. This could be described as early Theater-in-the-Round, but nothing more. It is vital to the performance that there should be communication between themselves and their audience... (Idem 1981:6).

Unlike other researchers, Helm offered both relevant and spicy examples about the confrontations between the mummers' bands, accompanied by the stealing of the most important ritual object from the losing group: the *hobby-horse*. In the same context, the English folklorist described the ritual of the hobby-horse's construction and the mock ritual of its burial in Chelshire just to be uncovered a year later when the mummers' band gathered once again. This information should be very valuable to any folklorist working throughout the Romanian territory, where such ceremonies are common in many villages where folk plays are still practiced (Oișteanu 2012). They have amazed me for sure, since both rituals are identical to ceremonies I have observed in Romanian villages. In the second chapter I have already mentioned the confrontations between the *Goat* teams (Popa 2006), the fight between the *Deer* teams' members in Crivești village, Iași county, and also the mock ritual of the Goat's hunting and killing (*vânarea și uciderea turcii*), followed by its burial and mourning recorded on camera by ethnologist Bogdan Neagota in the villages Romos, Romoșel and Vaidei close to Orăștie town, Hunedoara county, Transylvania region.

Helm is one of the few folklorists which promoted the idea that mummers' plays should be connected to other ceremonials that had been initially considered separate entities. Thus, he suggests, they could become part of a larger body where researchers should bring together related customs, tracing the borders and distinguishing between ceremonials displaying less similarities. This method of building typologies is not new to folklore; together with his fellows, E.C. Cawte and N. Peacock, Alex Helm approached it in his work *English Ritual Drama*, published in 1967. This work has a privileged position in the range of studies about folk theater. The reason is that the three folklorists manage to record an

impressive number of localities in England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, Leeward Islands and the United States of America, where the English folk drama takes or used to take place, next to the period it covers and the type of folk drama performed in those specific places. In case the specified ritual is extinct, the authors also offer the presumed year of its last performance in the given locality. In this meticulous and difficult exercise, the patrimonialization effort becomes obvious, encouraged by the desire to safeguard these vanishing folk dramas. Another particularity of this work is that the authors discard the concept of “mummers”, considering it to be too general, and replacing it with the term “*English ritual drama*” (also used for the book’s title). Despite this unbelievable effort, Alex Helm and his colleagues still pay tribute to the theory of searching for the mummers’ origins, and conclude that these rituals could be the degenerate remains of certain ancient fertility rituals (Cawte, Helm and Peacock 1967:30).

The end of the 1960s coincides with the publication of more important works about mummers. One of them, *Irish Folk Drama*, belongs to Alan Gailey (1969). Gailey tries to fill a gap extant in the Irish folkloristics that had studied the subject too little. He proves in the meantime the richness of the ritual material on this country’s territory, as well as its irregular distribution throughout the entire Ireland. Gailey supports the specific features of the Irish folk dramas as generally compared to British ones, emphasizing the appearance of original outfits – such as the strawmen – and of the name *Hogmanaymen* appointed to the mummers’ bands. However, he identifies within Irish plays the central topic of death and resurrection – a motif often observed in the mummers’ plays all over Great Britain. But an provocative topic he details is the relation between mummers’ plays and the collection of money for these shows. The subject had also been tackled by authors writing before Gailey, but he is the first one to discuss it in detail and quite passionately. Indeed, this represented an apple of discord among the authors regarding mummers as surviving elements of an archaic culture. If this were the case, the relations between the ones performing the customs and the spectators should be shaped as a generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1974) rather than as economic exchange involving a material interest and leading to a harsh rivalry resulting in violent confrontations between the masked groups fighting for the limited material resources of poor communities. Consequently, using examples from Anatolia or other European areas, Gailey tries to prove that there had been a time when the plays used to be performed by mummers in exchange of collecting food and beverage that would later be given back to the community by means of a collective local ceremony.



In this case, too, Romania is a relevant example. In my fieldwork, in Heleşteni *comună*, I came across both examples: mummers caroling only for money (the *Dance of the Goat* and the *Dance of the Deer*) and mummers performing the plays without any special financial reward, just for the food and beverage they got from the hosts (the *Pantomimic Mummers*). While in Moldova region most of the mummers perform for money, in some parts of Transylvania the situation is quite different. In Southern Transylvania, Breazova village, where the *Dance of the Deer* was extinct from the 1980s, the ritual consisted of collecting food and beverage that would later be offered back to the community during a collective party. Only a few kilometres away, in Sarmisegetuza village, by interviewing the locals, I managed to identify exactly the period when the *Dance of the Deer* started to be performed in exchange for money – right after the December 1989 Revolution. In addition, I could not find in the area any account of the mummers' bands and their violent confrontations. But in Moldova I found more villages, including the *comună* of Ruginoasa, Criveşti and Costeşti where the confrontations between mummers were almost an unwritten rule. This is how the reality of mummers displays an expressive richness that is difficult to frame into concepts, categories and typologies.

An author who tried to distance himself from the previous works on mummers and had a holistic approach on the incredible diverse reality of the mummers, is the American theater professor Alan Brody. He published his main work about mummers – *The English Mummers and Their Play, Traces of Ancient Mystery* – in 1969. Unlike the authors preceding him, Brody warned about the fact that mummers should be understood through the analysis of their actions rather than through their discourse.

This is one of the most maddening and, at the same time, fascinating aspects of the play. In one way it is also the most helpful. For, as one reads further into the enormous number of plays that have been collected since the seventeenth century from villages throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland, he discovers that no matter how many variations are rung on the same theme, the basic action remains constant (Brody 1971).

With such an assertion, Brody subtly criticizes the British folkloristics based on typologies and analyses of the mummers' texts. Despite trying to take distance from these approaches, Brody dedicates his work about mummers in England to the great folklorist Alex Helm and demonstrates that he knows well this tradition of English folkloristics. Just like Helm, Alan

Brody remarks that the use of the term “mummers” could generate confusions and wrong interpretations. Brody conducts a philological exegesis of the term *mummer*, showing that both the Dutch *momme* and the Danish *mumme* mean “to disguise oneself with a mask”. Yet, the research of folk plays in Great Britain, Brody observed, proves that there are mummers that wear no mask; instead, they only paint their face with soot. Besides, many folk plays classified as mummers’ plays by English folklorists are called in a completely different way by the participants (*hogmanaymen*, for instance) among whom some have never heard of mummers and any mask wearers.

Despite these extremely pertinent assertions, Brody’s approach finally follows the path of the similar studies preceding it – that of discovering the origins of those folk theater forms. By stating from the very beginning of his work that there are two common elements for all the folk theater plays (they are all seasonal and they all contain a death and a resurrection somewhere in the course of their action), Brody, too, fits the direction of the folkloristics looking for typologies of the versions of the folk elements collected from the people, and for a common origin. This origin, Brody says, is different for all the three plays analyzed: *The Sword Play*, *The Wooing Ceremony* and *The Hero-Combat*; but all of them go deep into the European history, to the fertility cults sometimes exemplified by ancient Greek dramaturgy. In spite of these assertions Brody remains a remarkable intellectual. In the concluding pages of his book, he struggles remarkably to prove how, during the troubled European history, British folk theater borrowed Christian elements that were later covered by various tendencies emerging with the advancement of industrialization and modernization. All these left a mark on English folk theater, but also left space for the contemporaries to find “traces of ancient mystery” in it.

By the end of the 1960s, there was a tendency to reconsider the right approach to mummers’ plays. This does not mean that the idea of looking for their origins was totally abandoned. Particularly when observing comparatively the literature about folk theater in other areas outside Great Britain, we notice that the tendency to search for the mummers’ origins is traceable even in the most recent publications. In this respect, a good example is the book *Dramatic structures in Romanian Folklore*, written by Romanian folklorist Gabriela Haja (Haja 2003). Guided by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Folkloristics and theater history (Burada 1991), Haja defines these forms of folk theater as being “of pre-Christian origin”, “expressive possibilities of magic thinking” (Haja 2003:16) based in fact on “archaic rites, equivalent to

ways of expressing sacralized, integrating visions of the world perceived as a harmonious totality” (Idem 2003:33).

The problematic part in this type of approaches is not only the methodology used, but especially the serenity of some famous researchers who draw parallels between customs nowadays and others thousands of years ago whose description comes only from some scarce information sources (see as an example Oişteanu 2012[1980]:85). Therefore, Craig Fees’ critique (Fees 1991, 1994) of the fact that, with their approaches, the originists denied the space and time factors, moving to conclusions too fast, based on a rather irrelevant material, is justified. However, the efforts and perseverance of these folklorists, philologists and theater historians endlessly digging deep into ancient archives of various European countries, revealed a series of remarkable information regarding the past of the old continent – information that talks undoubtedly about a series of folk theater plays performed by ordinary people, usually agriculturists (back then they were still not called peasants) hundreds of years ago (Du Cange 1678). Yet, the biggest scientific problem is that of establishing valid connections between these materials and the tradition of mummers – still practiced nowadays here and there in Europe.

However, sometimes even the path leading to a dead end might reveal an amazing landscape, or at least the certitude that that specific road lead to dead ends. During the early phase of my research about folk plays, although guided by the goal of finding their origin, I managed to discover some extraordinary information. Thus, in 2005, during collective research with my colleagues from *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica* on the *boul împănat/decorated ox* in Mănăstirea village, Mica comună, I came across the information revealing why this ritual was much more different than those in the neighboring villages. While interviewing a former organizer of the ritual – back then, in 2005, an old man with health and alcohol addiction problems and, therefore, marginalized both by his family and the villagers – he surprised me enormously with the things he revealed. In his youth, he had been extremely creative and original. He was the one who, just three decades before, as main organizer of the ritual, changed the whole morphology of the rituals by introducing new elements and situations that made it difficult to comprehend by the folklorists who investigated it in the coming years. The information was later confirmed by other villagers and then by the members of the man’s family. In the same interview, the oldman expressed his sorrow regarding his sons’ conservatism – since they were the new organizers of the ritual in the present – because they would not want to introduce other new elements within the

same custom; for instance, besides the *decorated ox*, extant in all Whitsuntide rituals from neighboring villages, a decorated donkey could have also followed the ox.

More recently, in 2010, while addressing some questions about the origin of the *Dance of the Deer* in Oboroceni village, Iași County, to a woman aged 90, I found out that the ritual had been borrowed by the youth in Oboroceni from a neighboring village – Costești. This had happened when she was only about 12-14, meaning around the year 1928-1930. The same piece of information was later confirmed by two men in their nineties living in the same village.

Thus, sometimes the explanations regarding the origin of certain rituals seem to be simpler than we would believe. Within a given historic, political and social context, human mind and creativity are the ones accounting for the transformations rural rituals undergo in time. How, when exactly and why these changes took place – these are questions that remain extremely difficult to answer because of the lack of detailed written documents or locals' testimonies. Having stated that, we move on to the analysis of the literature about mummers after the end of the 60s.

### **3. The Terminologists**

From the late 1960s, the scientific literature about mummers' plays witnesses the rise of some tendencies that detach from the previous ones in terms of goal and orientation. One of these directions is represented by authors who are willing to find a clear definition of the mummers' plays. Probably one of the causes of this orientation was the confused use of more concepts in the past that would describe mummers' plays without a prior demarcation of this conceptual border or of the rituals considered under the giant umbrella of mummers. Therefore, this new paradigm wanted to find an operational definition regarding folk theater; in the meantime, it developed next to a critical attitude (Tillis 1999) – that was quite bitter in some authors (see Millington 2002) – against the scholars of the past who were busy finding the mummers' origin in the depths of the European history.

One of the first authors to adopt this orientation in the short study *Folk Drama* is the outstanding American folklorist Roger D. Abrahams (Abrahams 1972). Ever since the beginning of his article, Abrahams speaks about the “imprecision of generic definitions” as a fact leading to a series of misunderstandings and wrong interpretations; therefore, the American folklorist hurries to define folk drama “as a traditional play activity that relies

primarily on dialogue to establish its meaning and that tells a story through the combination of dialogue and action, the outcome of which is known to the audience ahead of time” (Abrahams 1972:353). Unfortunately, just as other folklorists of the previous decades, Abrahams cannot see the mummers’ plays as more than the embodiment of theater plays. This is probably the reason why his definition excludes from the start a series of mummers’ activities and plays – for instance, the pantomimic mummers observed in Newfoundland Island, minutiously described by Halpert, Story and other authors (Halpert and Story 1969; Jarvis 2014). In the case of these mummers, the dialogue is totally absent while the play is focused only on action and the mummers’ behavior; although they could be associated to a certain pattern, they sometimes surprise the spectators.

After achieving this definition, Abrahams engages in a critique of the previous literature about mummers, as well as in a comparison between cult and folk dramas; this approach finally leads him to a discussion regarding the mummers’ origin – a fact reminding the experienced researcher about the works of the originists. The genuine element of Abrahams’ work consists of having tried to explore in his article the expression of the ludus element in the human behavior, and to show at the same time that folk drama is connected to various festive occasions celebrated by human communities.

A more complex and more conclusive approach in this respect belongs to Thomas A. Green, another American folklorist which, in the article *Toward a Definition of Folk Drama* published in 1978, tried to prepare the field for authors that would like to tackle the concept of folk drama in their future works. The American scholar begins with the distinction between drama and social life – a distinction he regards as totally obscure. Influenced simultaneously by folklorist Roger Abrahams and theater historian Alan Brody, Green pleads for understanding folk drama “as a performance incorporating mimesis and role distribution among two or more players” (T. A. Green 1978). Mimesis, as we know, is an imitation of the real world under various artistic shapes. As a result, the strategy of defining folk drama with the use of mimesis allows Green to narrow the field of mummers’ plays, by drawing a clear distinction between the theatrical manifestations based on dialogue (a dialogue that had already been credited by Abrahams as an essential element of drama) and other ritual forms still based on play, but including less dialogue and acting parts, despite the fact that acting would only mean performing a role in the daily existence of the ordinary peasant. The conclusions of Green’s work stand for the influence of the semiotician and theater theoretician Petr Bogatyrev who is even quoted by the American folklorist in the article I am

talking about. According to Bogatyrev, the concept of folk play could also include those folk plays that rise when peasants appropriated and transformed motifs and topics from cult theater plays, transposing them in an amateur theatrical performance that was more accessible to ordinary individuals (Bogatyrev 1998[1929]:55).

The idea of redefining mimesis has been of special interest among American folklorists. Anne C. Burson, for instance, in the text *Model and Text in Folk Drama* from 1980, takes up Thomas Green's vision on mimesis, reevaluates it and finally concludes that: "A folk drama is a mimetic performance whose text and style of presentation are based on traditional models; it is presented by members of a group to other members of the same reference group. A specific inherited text is not the determining factor that makes an event folk drama; rather, it is the traditional pattern on which the event is based" (Burson, 1980:316).

Going through the works of the authors we have called terminologists, we are left with the same impression as the one that the originists gave us – namely that the science of mummers advances with slow and doubtful steps. Bombastic categories are not absent at all once again, probably stemming from the ardent wish of discovering the final answer that would enhance the thorough understanding of mummers and their plays.

A.E. Green's article *Popular Drama and the Mummer's Play* belongs to this category. Starting with a case study – a custom from Cheshire region, Antrobus village, A.E. Green focuses on the elements, the symbols and the social network of a tradition called *Soulcaking Play* that is held once per year around Halloween (A. E. Green 1980). The play performed in Antrobus village belongs to the *Hero-Combat Play* category, a type of folk theater that could not be regarded, Green insists, as a relic of the past, but as a property of the working class in England. In Green's words "[h]ence British working-class theater: even when rural in provenance, these plays are the property, and their performance the expression, of an agrarian proletariat, not a peasantry; and their provenance is just as often the small town or the industrial village" (Idem 1980:143). The English folklorist goes on defining his theory, and suggests that "the frame of reference of the mummers' play is in some important respects a nineteenth-century one" (Ibidem 1980:143).

To support his theory, the English author uses the next arguments: written mentionings of the mummers' plays before 1800 are very rare, whereas the ones after this date go beyond several hundreds; most of these mentionings do not come from the traditional

and conservative British islands, but from the industrial centers situated in the heart of England; the participants to the Antrobus rituals that were interviewed have a clear conscious of the practice of tradition, but this tradition is connected to workers' communities in the cities and not to rural culture; all the characters in the local version of the Hero-Combat Play would be marginal to any type of village community and surely belong to urban culture; the progressive extinction of the mummers' plays during the 20th century has to do with the emergence of an alternative entertainment related to modern culture that led to the loss of meaning of these now obsolete plays.

A.E. Green support his theory and bombastic hypothesis by means of careful revisions of the arguments that were more likely to be attacked, thus proving that he understands what the criticism would look like. In the case of the first argument, for instance, he mentions that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a significant increase in the amount of written texts, and its accessibility for the larger population grew. More, he states that extrapolation from the fieldwork data in the 1970s to the texts of various origins – some of which doubtful – is just as difficult as an extrapolation from today's mummers to those described by the literature dating back to the Middle Ages. In other words, Green adopts a purely synchronic vision according to which the mummers' plays performed by the working class culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century belong to an urban world because their relation to rural universe cannot be demonstrated. In my opinion, as a researcher of the East-European area, such a demonstration could only belong to an author from a country with a long industrial tradition – England, in this case, the country with the longest such tradition. The only thing is that, in this case, the more than 200 years between 1760 and 1970 could completely erase the traces proving the mummers' transition from the rural world to the urban one. In Romania – a country where industrialization started forcibly especially during the early communist years of the 1950s, researchers managed to record the way folk theater passed from the rural world to the urban one and particularly the changes occurring after this passage.

The Romanian folklorist Horia Barbu Oprișan was a keen and sometimes sorrowful recorder of the changes occasionally taking place right under his eyes. The English translation of this assiduous fieldworker's studies could prevent the mummers' researchers in England from launching theories with sensational effects on the mummers' scientific community. Without starting a critique of the theories in this category, I am stating that, from a purely synchronic perspective, the *Dance of the Goat* (described in the second chapter of this study) that I witnessed at the age of five, in 1978, as a young dweller of a mining town,

could be interpreted as a purely urban tradition because some of the elements and meanings of the village ritual had been eliminated when transferred to the world of the workers' culture. Similarly, the *Bear*, *Goat* and *Deer* teams in the streets of Bucharest that I saw on December 2009, when I started my research on folk plays, could be described as part of the urbanized culture of the capital city, without any connection to the rural realm.

This kind of interpretation is possible because this type of rituals already has a few decades old tradition, and many of the symbols they had had when migrating from the rural world were lost over the years; meanwhile, new elements were introduced according to the main goal of the participants – all of them belonging to the first or second generation of urbanized peasants – namely that of gaining some money for the performance. But finally the biggest obstacle in front of Green's theory is the village of Antrobus itself. The author forgets to mention the fact that this is actually a former rural community, urbanized more intensely only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; by community I actually mean only 800 people who know each other and boast with the promotion of a sense of community. Although the concept of peasant seems outdated today for such a strongly and long standing industrialized country, the village of Antrobus is still connected to rurality due to its history and geographical position; meanwhile, the bars where the performers of the *Soulcaking Play* tradition present their Halloween sketches could be counted on the fingers of one hand because the locality is extremely small.

Martin J. Lovelace's article *Christmas Mumming in England: The House Visit* belongs to the same category of the emphatic. Lovelace starts from a hypothesis issued by the folklorist Herbert Halpert, stating that "the Newfoundland custom of the informal-visit, with an accompanying guessing game, might be assumed to have originated in the British Isles despite the lack of detailed reports from England itself" (Lovelace 1980). When launching his theory, Lovelace begins from a simple observation: there are nowadays two mummers' traditions that seem to be different from each other. One belongs to the mummers in England, where poor English workers find a way to earn some money from higher classes during winter holidays by presenting a theater performance in front of the rich ones' houses. The second tradition is represented by the so-called house-visit-in-disguise, performed particularly between friends, generally by persons belonging to the same social class, without money collection, only aimed at entertainment and fun. In this case, he is pointing at a pantomimic representation of mummers, followed by the hosts' attempt to guess who is behind the masks than about a theater play. This tradition is still extant today in former



English islands including Newfoundland. On these islands, communities are usually more cohesive and have thus managed to preserve a series of ancient elements of traditions that have disappeared in England or have changed irreversibly under the pressure of industrialization and modernization. Lovelace's suggestion is that Mummings' Play, supposedly of ancient origins, is in fact a more recent invention derived from the house-visit-in-disguise tradition extant especially in certain British islands, but almost vanished in England and which is, actually, the older authentic tradition.

For a mummings' researcher in Romania, Lovelace's comparison is extremely interesting especially because the two traditions could be simultaneously identified sometimes even within a single locality like Heleşteni for instance or in the neighboring villages. The fascinating fact is that, indeed, in Heleşteni, the custom informal-house-visit-in-disguise has the same goal as in Newfoundland – entertainment and fun – without involving money collection. In exchange, the *Deer* or the *Goat's* plays are morphologically similar to some folk theater plays in England such as the ones revolving around the figure of the masked hobbyhorse. This mask is almost identical to the *Deer* or *Goat* masks in Moldova! Well, in an overwhelming number of cases I have observed in Moldova's villages, these folk theater plays are being performed only for money. The first striking aspect that can be neither denied, nor easily explained, is that of the equivalence between the Moldavian custom of mummings and the so-called informal-house-visit-in-disguise in the Newfoundland islands. These two traditions had cultural itineraries independent from each other. However, the way they look today is almost identical. The second issue emerging is the fact that, according to all the data available, folk theater traditions such as *the Deer* or *Goat* dance in Eastern Romania are older than the mummings' home visiting – meaning exactly the opposite of Lovelace's statements. Anyway, all these instances mentioned by me above need explanations, and the model Lovelace proposed cannot provide any. Moreover, it tries to support an exactly opposite hypothesis compared to my real findings based on field research data.

Leaving aside this dispute, we move to Steve Tillis, another important author of folk drama studies. He is an author who aims to approach mummings analytically and to revise their classification, elaborating simultaneously an operational definition of folk drama. Being a researcher with a background in theater studies, Tillis is a mature writer who knows that studying folk drama and mummings' plays means swimming muddy waters that were better left still. Therefore, his behaviour is cautious, and he advances slowly in the intricate network

of texts about mummers, minutiously analyzing a pile of studies not only from Europe, but from all over the world. Thus, Tillis reaches notable results, supported not only by the conclusions of his book *Rethinking Folk Drama*, but also by his perpetual fight for understanding and analyzing folk drama. One of the worthy aspects of this work is that, before offering a complex definition of folk drama, he analyzes an impressive amount of works whose number exceeds by far the number of works we have mentioned in the present study. This is why the readers interested in the bibliography about mummers and folk drama could find very elaborate references inside Tillis' study.

The American author starts by analyzing a paradox he had noticed: the concepts of "folk" and "drama" seem to have opposite meanings. This happens because folklore is dominated by the study of oral texts, whereas drama deals with the analysis of cult literary texts. Starting with the assumption – also seen in previous studies – that the vast mummers' field needs a clear distinction between folk drama forms and other types of manifestations having less obvious theatrical underlayers, Tillis follows only two fundamental goals: that of rethinking folk drama in a way that would make its meaning clearer, and that of understanding the cultures performing this cultural genre. These two goals, apparently insignificant, could lead to understanding a universal problem – the way folk drama "ultimately reflects and affects human life itself" (Tillis 1999:xv).

Another interesting point made by Tillis's work is that it also speaks about the Eurocentrism in the approaches to folk drama – a topic that had not been approached until that time by the literature about mummers. Probably this is also the reason why Tillis opens his study with a series of folk drama examples such as *Yangge Dance* and *Wang Ming-yueh Plans a Divorce* that belong to the Chinese geographical and cultural space. These plays, according to the American researcher, could also be included in the realm of folk drama. This advanced vision and his holistic perspective on folk drama make Tillis produce some of the most valuable reflections in the history of this discipline:

David Holm suggests that beyond the *boat* and *dry land* there are traits of Yangge similar to traits in the English Mummers' Play: the hobby horse, large carnival figures, [and] stick dances (1984:17 n.27). Leaving aside any criticism of Holm's understanding of the Mummers' Play, we might easily add to his list such traits as house-to-house visits, association with the New Year season, and the character of the quack doctor. But is there any meaning to these similarities, or are they mere

happenstance? Have any or all of these traits developed independently at both ends of the Eurasian continent, or are they manifestations of a single development that has somehow been transmitted across a huge geographic expanse? And if they were independently developed, what were the proximate causes of their development? (Tillis 1999:11).

The answer – comprising an extraordinary intuition proving a deep understanding of the reality investigated – is even more admirable than the questions raised:

Indeed, given the nearly universal impulse toward drama, it might well be that folk drama can teach us something not only about particular cultures, but about humanity at large. If we can find patterns in the folk drama of cultures from around the world, we might fairly speak of the *self-presentation* and *self-reflection* of humanity itself (Idem 1999:11).

Later in the work, Tillis engages in a critical dialogue with the tradition of folk drama research, amending it from time to time. Towards the final pages, the American author polemicizes with certain hypotheses and theories of the area, contesting them in the light of his new research (see, for instance, Tillis 1999:193). Following these struggles, Tillis manages to provide a complex definition of folk drama:

Folk drama is theatrical performance, within a frame of make-believe action shared by performers and audience, that is not fixed by authority but is based in living tradition and displays greater or lesser variation in its repetition of this tradition; its performance, enacted over time and space with practices of design, movements, speech, and/or music, engenders and/or enhances a sense of communal identity among those who participate in its delivery and reception (Ibidem 1999:140).

Although the folk drama definition advanced by Tillis is extremely useful and contains a series of important elements such as the communal identity between spectator and performers, this theater professor could unfortunately see nothing more than a theatrical performance in the folk dramas he analyzed. This assumption makes him exclude a whole range of cultural expressions that could be understood and analyzed as mummers plays. However, Tillis' study still remains a foundation stone for the edifice of literature about folk drama and mummers' plays.

A final author that could not be omitted in this display of terminologists is Peter Thomas Millington. His PhD thesis, *The Origins and Development of English Folk Plays*, represents one of the most strenuous efforts to understand the whole realm of literature about mummers. This author's passion for mummers dates back to several decades ago, and the amount of material he analyzes in his thesis is impressive. In my opinion, at least, the first part of the work is the most convincing. It revises critically the most important texts forming the literature about mummers, beginning with the first publications about mummers and continuing with the more elaborate studies by Thomas Ordish and the folklorists following him. The critical debate in the literature review tries and almost manages to be exhaustive, standing for the proficiency of the researcher who studied the issue for a long time. However, it seems that in the case of this erudite author, the means finally become the goal and, further on, the main topic of the work. Thus, the revision of the old literature about mummers, instead of serving a higher aim such as understanding mummers' plays, turns into the fundamental topic of the work; as a result, it finally and paradoxically reminds us of the approach of the authors it criticized, namely the survivalists. Unfortunately, the critique of the originist authors suddenly turns bitter and transforms Millington's work into a demonstration of the opposite ideas that the originists supported: mummers' plays are not the survivors of ancient or medieval times, but originate in more recent times – the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This conclusion is supported by means of a series of digital and statistic techniques that offer a more detailed analysis of the texts of the plays included in the research. Based on them, Millington decrees that the mummers' origin does not go beyond the year 1750. Nevertheless, for stating this he uses a strategy: he replaces the word "mummers" – considered vague and ambiguous – with one considered more suggestive and relevant from a statistical perspective: *The Quack Doctor*. The only problem with the new concept for mummers is that it has never been used by the actants themselves when naming mummers' plays. The title was chosen for purely statistical reasons: because the *Quack Doctor* character from English folk theater plays appears most often in the texts of the analyzed plays. However, he does not appear in all of these plays, a fact mentioned repeatedly even by Millington himself! It becomes useless to add that in order to reach his final conclusion regarding the precise age of certain English folk theater plays, Millington has to select a fragment from the extremely diverse reality of mummers and to focus only on some folk theater plays in Great Britain, leaving aside other areas of Europe and of the world where this kind of performances were frequent. As we recall, Steve Tillis had brought new relevant

examples from China and presented them reassuring that they belonged to folk drama. In fact, what we observed in Millington's study, represents one of the general tendencies in texts written by authors I consider terminologists. Most of them tried to narrow the path of mummers' plays by eliminating some of the tendencies deemed disputable; later, they gave another title to the newly created category, hoping to draw some clear and distinct conceptual limits. This feature places most of the authors in this category at the opposite side of the originists who tried to extend the mummers' plays realm towards a series of sometimes hardly known rituals separated by a long distance in time and space. The quarrel between the originists and the terminologists has not really brought important scientific benefits; meanwhile, the interesting results concerning the mummers happened outside this dispute. And, stating that mummers' origin does not go beyond the year 1750, transforms Millington into yet another type of originist. The mind frame that makes him approach the realm of mummers is that of an originist and it is still there. The only thing that differentiates him from his early predecessors is that of 'finding' a more recent origin of the mummers' plays, plus a more innovative methodology based on statistic computer programs.

#### **4. The Ethnographers/The Synchronists**

The late 1960s also mark the emergence of other orientations regarding the mummers' plays, besides the terminologists. We are referring to a series of anthropologists and folklorists who started from the premise that these rituals cannot be understood outside the borders of the community performing them or outside the meaning that the performers themselves gave them through their behavior and actions (Glassie 1975: xii). Furthermore, some researchers reached the conclusion that mummers could offer "a unique field for observation" – an opportunity "to test the assumption about the social mechanisms and nature of rural communities" (Halpert and Story 1969). It was considered that this enterprise would not only be appealing, but also necessary because certain communities with a European descent such as the fishing ones in Newfoundland, were completely unknown to the anthropological literature.

These simple observations made it possible that the established methods of anthropology - such as the participant observation and the interviews with the play actants - gained their right place in the research about mummers' plays. The opening of this tradition and its implementation in the research about mummers is associated to the names of two scholars on the North-American continent: folklorist Herbert Halpert and philologist G.M.

Story. The volume they edited together in 1969 – *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* – became a foundation stone and a reference in the study of mummers' play (see for example Creed 2011:17); meanwhile, the island of Newfoundland, Canada's easternmost territory, became a famous land for the research of mummers' plays (see Gunnell ed. 2007:755).

Bringing together a series of anthropologists, folklorists and ethnologists, the volume of the two researchers offers a detailed perspective on the mummers' complex in Newfoundland Island, as well as many valuable ethnographic pieces of information coming from various communities on the island. Entitled *Newfoundland: Fishermen, Hunters, Planters and Merchants*, G.M. Story's text seems to be only occasionally related to a proper understanding of the mummers in this area (Story 1969). The reason is that the work speaks about the contemporary history of this island and the changes in the region's economy because of the new social-economic demands brought especially by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All these changes left a mark on the way local communities evolved in time, from fishery to logging and mining industries after World War II, and witnessing the passage to an economic cycle oriented towards commerce and modern communication in recent years. All the data are extremely interesting when related to the other articles in the volume which are explicitly focused on the mummers' complex. This way, Story's text becomes a valuable tool showing how the historic-economic processes can influence the community practices and, finally, the meaning and performance of the mummers' plays.

With his background in folklore studies, Herbert Halpert seems to follow the direction of the terminologist writers in his text, and even the old direction of the originists (Halpert 1969). He speaks about the huge number of customs that could be covered by the mummers' category. From the very start of his paper, Halpert presents relevant cases from Canada, America, England, Austria and Germany, as well as more ancient ones – such as the ones in Thrace. Throughout the text, Halpert enriches the list with rituals from Ecuador, Scotland, Trinidad and even from Tolstoy's Russia giving the example taken from the novel *War and Peace* where a mummers' visit is described with the incredible talent of the Russian writer. Besides this display of mummers – a proof of the American folklorist's erudition – the text focused on the creation of a category of mummers in Newfoundland Island, based on two main categories and four sub-categories. In fact, we are talking about an attempt to categorize the behavior and actions of mummers during the rituals they performed around New Year and Christmas – the main days when the rituals used to be performed.

This classification seems to be necessary for the case of Newfoundland Island where the mummers' complex displays a morphology slightly different from the folk theater plays in England. In this complex landscape, Halpert observes that there are elements in the mummers' behavior that complicate the entire picture. One of them is the violence bringing a different tone to certain mummers' groups on the Canadian island. Choosing fascinating details to describe the dark face of the mummers' behavior, Halpert observes that it is not common to all the communities on the island. The same thing could be stated about the other categories of the typology – they fit some mummers, but cannot be generalized to all groups. Therefore, the conclusion of the American folklorist seems disconcerting compared to the whole effort invested in the creation of this complex typology:

The typology presented in this essay, it must again be stressed, is intended as a descriptive framework within which the diverse material of the whole mumming complex may be viewed. What has not, perhaps, been sufficiently emphasized is that the diversity of this material is such that any categorization is extremely hazardous, for frequently what a typology seeks to delimit is, in practice, found in overlapping areas (Halpert 1969:61).

With such a conclusion, Folkloristics seems to understand its limits in describing and understanding mummers, opening the way for anthropology and its field research methods to study these rituals. Indeed, other contributors to the volume offer various perspectives and details about the Newfoundland communities that practice mummers' plays. In his paper *Mumming in Deep Harbour: Aspects of Social Organization in Mumming and Drinking*, anthropologist Louis J. Chiaramonte gives us an elaborate picture of the mummers' groups that go carolling in the islands' communities during winter holidays (Chiaramonte 1969). One of the most alluring aspects related to Newfoundland mummers is the alcohol consumption – social drinking being one of the most common features of the island mummers. In fact, all of the behavioral manifestations of mummers during winter holidays are strongly connected to the community identity of the participants. Being a mummer also means strengthening certain bonds within the community where the ones performing the mummers spend their daily life and do their daily work, but also in relation to other community members whom they have less contact with during the year.

Mumming not only involves the community in an intriguing guessing-game; it requires identification of the people who are playing the game. The community takes

stock of its members; many may not have visited any of the houses on the other side of the harbour since the last funeral or wedding; in particular, young children are named and their growth appraised. Christmas in Deep Harbour can be viewed, then, as an event in which the community reaffirms its identity (Chiaramonte 1969:103).

Another article, reaching similar conclusions by means of a different argumentation, belongs to John F. Szwed – *The Mask of Friendship: Mumming as a Ritual of Social Relations*. Szwed adopts the classical path of the fieldwork anthropologist, and tries to scan mummers from a single village on the island – Ross village, situated a few miles away from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in one of the few fertile areas of the island. After describing the place and the village inhabitants, Szwed follows – maybe for the first time in the history of the studies about mummers – the anthropological theories about reciprocity, social structure and ritual, trying to explain the mummers’ plays through these concepts. According to the observations collected on the field and to the frame provided by the theories mentioned above, the initial social hostility between mummers and the host becomes an expression of the hostility between a smaller community – based on the equality of its members and on positive reciprocity relations – and possible outsiders that could alter the fragile social balance. Therefore, the whole situation between the mummers and the host, initially hostile, as well as the game of guessing who is wearing the mask, finally leads to a “recreation and renewal of the social order” (Szwed 1969:117), the minute after the one behind the mask is acknowledged as a member of that community and not as an outsider.

Rituals of social reaffirmation mark Newfoundland communities off from the larger part of Western complex society; whereas the urban-oriented world rejects and denies social conflicts and repressed hostility, groups such as those found in Ross are able to utilize this same material in open expression to limit the strength of conflict in the group.

Other articles in the volume edited by Halpert and Story try to approach mummers as social control mechanism (Ben-Dor 1969), but also as a cognitive complex that reinforces gender roles after the temporary social reversal operated by transvestite mummers – an expression of the aggressive and socially polluted alterity. After having guessed the real persons behind the masks, the return to normality could also mean a return to the community – a space of peaceful and predictable intentions and behavior compared to the outside world that seems ominous, unpredictable, uninhibited, dangerous and polluting (Faris 1969). Displaying this



wide series of interpretations and descriptions of the Newfoundland mummers, the volume edited by the two North American researchers opens the way for a new research direction in the discipline.

Henry Glassie, for instance, in his *All Silver and No Brass* (1975), also approaches mummers from the perspective of their relation with local communities and their rules. Despite the fact that he identifies himself as being a folklorist, he starts with a well-argued critique of the attempts conducted by the Folkloristics tradition preceding him to understand and to explain mummers. This critique against *the originists* is not destructive; on the contrary, it is efficient and well directed. What Glassie reproaches his predecessors, is that they had paid too little attention to the intentional and emotional dimension these plays had for their performers. Precisely because of that, Glassie builds his study around the interviews of some Irish communities' members who had participated or witnessed these rituals themselves. Thus, he proves that, contrary to the originist thinkers' tradition, mummers are not the ghosts of customs once alive, but still live to the present day, as long as the communities practicing them remain cohesive and un-atomized (Glassie 1975:121).

Consequently, mummers could be understood from two perspectives, as parts of a larger totality (the European culture), but also as autonomous ethnographic units whose functioning is closely related to community life and could be described in relation to it (Idem 1975:59). This is one of the basic reasons why mummers should be observed in relation to the community producing them. Only this way, Glassie believes, the researcher could hope to understand the social and economic changes that transformed mummers' plays from pagan fertility and agricultural abundance rites into a source of fun and entertainment (Ibidem 1975:135). Promoting this model in understanding the mummers, Glassie also brings into discussion other elements contributing to the strengthening of community relations through mummers' plays. Alcohol consumption, the lack of a firm barrier between actors and spectators – the last ones turning into actants, too –, overcoming the difficulties through drama and entertainment and, last but not least, the controlled violence, are part of this complex landscape where communities redraw their physical and social frontiers expressing in the meantime their goodwill and hope by means of these ritual plays.

A comprehensive article published only two years after the publication of Glassie's book pleads for intensive fieldwork and for interviewing community members. Entitled *The*

*Antrobus Soulcaking*<sup>45</sup> *Play: An Alternative Approach to the Mummers' Play*, the article is written by anthropologist Susan Pattison. She is one of the first anthropologists to relate mummers' plays to the impact of changes taking place in England's economy (labor migration, for instance) and their impact on the inhabitants of a small locality, now de-ruralized. In this context of profound social-economic changes, mummers' plays performers are no longer peasants, but commuting workers who work and sometimes live permanently in the towns around Antrobus. For them, the living tradition of mummers had become an opportunity to reinforce a sense of community that seemed to vanish because of the economic transformations the locality went through during the previous decades. Thus, *Soulcaking Play* becomes a unifying factor that gives the participants a sense of belonging and of promoting local values represented by a physical object – *the head of the Wild Horse* – one of the permanent assets of mummers, transmitted from generation to generation for more than 200 years, according to the statements of the participants. The feelings of cohesion and sense of community speak about a living tradition, still practiced by workers and labor migrants; thus, it could not be regarded as a reminiscence of ancient fertility cults, as *originist* folklorists had interpreted it. In the meantime, Pattison reaches a safe conclusion regarding mummers' plays, an option placing her among the authors who stay away from speculations and unsustainable theories that are very tempting in this sometimes very slippery topic of research:

It seems to me that the motivation behind and the response to the Mummers's Play will vary from place to place and time to time, and that in order to make any step forward in our understanding we must abandon the impulse toward a single interpretation which will explain all examples of the play's performance. Each occurrence of the tradition must be studied in the context of the community in which it occurs and by reference to those taking part. By looking for tenuous clues to an understanding of the Mummers's Play in the past we risk missing the valuable concrete evidence available to us in the present (Pattison 1977:11).

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<sup>45</sup> "The old English custom of souling or soul caking is thought to date back to the tenth century or even pagan times. The soul cakers would go from house to house singing either a begging song or a plea for prayers for the dead. They would put on a play for the residents. These plays would often be performed out of necessity when farm work was in short supply. Soul cakes were small, spiced fruitcakes, not unlike our hot cross buns, and these were given out to the performers, as well as drink or money. It could help to keep their family fed during lean times. Those involved with such groups were often unwilling to admit to it, as they did not like to confess to begging. However, it could be quite lucrative. It is said that three nights of mumming (acting out the plays) often raised as much as a whole month's wages for the agricultural labourers who mostly made up the groups" <http://www.winsfordhistorysociety.co.uk>.

For Romania, the 1980s coincide with the publication of one of the most significant works about folk theater – *Teatrul fără scenă/Theater without Stage* (Oprișan 1981) and *Teatrul popular românesc/Romanian Folk Theater* (Oprișan 1987) by folklorist Horia Barbu Oprișan. I call this relentless researcher of folk theater a folklorist because he had been described as such by certain representatives of Romanian Folkloristics. Nevertheless, the term “anthropologist” or “original author” used by Ovidiu Papadima who wrote the preface of one of these books (Papadima 1981), would be more appropriate for truly describing the assiduous field research conducted over more than five decades by a man who loved with all his heart every manifestation of “folk theater without stage” and spent all his winter holidays among the mummers, far from his own family. This is a fair perspective since Oprișan rejected from the beginning the pedantic discourses and the excessively typologizing inclinations of Romanian folkloristics, and was pleased to depict, mostly through the voice of his interlocutors, the live reality of Romanian mummers. Without pretending to be meticulous, he did not withdraw from writing down funny details such as the quality of the wine offered by the hosts – who were actually the main organizers of these events in various villages –, his parties with mummers, as well as his childhood recollections related to the night visits of the mummers at the house of the “railway station chief” – his own father. This free style writing, combining cultural anthropology and oral histories study, far from the patterns of Romanian folkloristics, caused him harsh criticism, as well as the “unscientific” label to all of his works on folk theater (Adăscăliței 1966:147).

However, I believe that Oprișan was the most important personality among the researchers of folk theater in Romania. Had he published his works earlier and had the English researchers of folk drama known his original works, they would have avoided many hesitations, useless dilemmas and meaningless fumbling on large unexplored territories without finally bringing anything new to the study of mummers. This is possible because, during five decades (1930-1980), Oprișan managed to gather an impressively rich material about folk theater. He collected this material in a time when Romanian peasantry went through the most dramatic transformation of its entire history that far. We are talking about the time between 1930 and 1980, the five decades when Romanian peasantry transitioned from a system of natural economy – represented by the closed world of the village – to the ‘infinite universe’ (Bourdieu 2008:174) represented by the urban world, the development of heavy industry, the often violent engineering projects meant to systematize agriculture and small peasant households – all of which finally led to the transformation of the farmer-

peasant into a worker-peasant (Cole 1976). These changes were reflected into the performance of the mummers' plays, their dynamics, symbolism and morphology. In this restless context, Oprișan was the right man at the right place, describing all the transformations of the “theater without stage” over an entire century. Due to the interviews he had taken to elder villagers – remarkable representatives of the local collective memory – this “original thinker” (Papadima 1987) managed to go back to the late 19th century, shedding light on earlier mummers' performances.

Based on this rich material, Oprișan tells us – sometimes letting his interlocutors talk – how a series of simple genuinely peasant plays, initially connected to the village world – such as the *Dance of the Goat* – changed into something different and almost unrecognizable. Living a time when these plays changed under his own eyes, he could not face the dilemmas and hesitations of English or American researchers. Therefore, it is fascinating to notice the freedom with which he narrated the folk theater plays he had witnessed. For Oprișan, folk theater had a purely peasant origin, and its contact to the urban world brought a series of inventions and adornments caused by the “lust for money” and meant to please a larger semi-urbanized audience that could offer more money to the performers. Old elements – including the *deochi*/enchantment and *descântec*/disenchantment by the body of the deceased character in view of a revival – were replaced by the physician arriving to make an injection that would bring the dead one back to life. Likewise, figures pertaining to the rural world such as the shepherd or the old man, owners of the goat or the ones disenchanting it, were replaced by clowns or by the physician with his syringe. Interestingly, for originist writers such as Thomas Ordish, this was exactly the reason for speculation regarding the moment and way the shaman turned into a physician. Well, for Oprișan this could not be a dilemma since he recorded precisely the moment when these transformations had taken place.

Perhaps his article *Satelitul/The Satellite* (Oprișan 1965) is more relevant than the books he published in the 1980s. It speaks about a group of peasants from a mountain village in Moldova who decide to replace the traditional *Dance of the Goat* with *the Satellite*, thus moving from a traditional play to an urban, even sci-fi topic. The play revolves around the construction of a small wooden satellite covered in metal sheet and painted in light yellow color. Just as the other folk theater plays, the topic of the play focuses more on action and on a series of absurd elements that generate a grotesque, comic atmosphere – a sort of opera buffa. Aliens come to visit Earth and try to communicate through sign language with terrestrials – the peasants in the audience – but communication is not easy; as a result, aliens

first sit at the table and get their lunch, taking a crow, a rat, some dead sparrows, a sheep head and some onions out of the satellite, to the general surprise and laughter of the audience (Oprișan 1965:67).

The end of the 1950s – when this play was performed in the small mountain village of Cuejd in Neamț county – actually marks the time when the contact between the village and the urban world had become more frequent, and schooling as well as written press were already made accessible to a larger number of peasants as a result of the educational communist policy. All these are the fundamentals of the *Satellite* play and of the freedom to replace a traditional play with a new one, invented ad-hoc. Witnessing all these transformations of the Romanian village, Oprișan himself lives the changes of the Romanian rural world together with the “theater without stage” actors; meanwhile, these changes speak for themselves for the transformations of folk theater scenarios. This is why Oprișan repeatedly emphasized that village performances he had witnessed represented a live world and, consequently, they changed at the same time with the society they belonged to. This way, the Romanian researcher seems to offer a simple explanation to problems that seemed inextricable in the British literature about mummers. What does not matter too much is when and how these plays emerged, as well as how the irreversible transformations of ancient plays took place, or whether the new plays rather belonged to workers’ culture than to the rural one. Finally, we are dealing with the human mind creating dramatic scenarios where it participates next to a community when that community is cohesive and people are used to express their experiences and feelings to each other through various forms, symbols and representations. Because, in the end, the origin of such a folk theater play consists of something rather trivial, part of the daily existence, than of something sensational. Oprișan covers all these aspects when writing about the way the *Satellite* play was born:

They walked with the Satellite in Cuejd, mountain village situated close to Piatra-Neamț, in 1959. The idea and the organization of this performance were the responsibility of Alexandru Corfu, born in 1940. «I’ve heard and read about the satellite – the author of the performance says – but, one day, while I was in the forest to cut wood, I don’t know how an idea crossed my mind: *What if I made a satellite and we walked with it?* – I told my brother who was also working in the forest, and then I confessed that to a friend, too. They agreed to do it together, to stop walking with the *Goat* or the *Bear*. With the *Satellite* was something nobody had seen or done before» (Oprișan 1965:65).

Perceiving mummers' plays as diverse and complex forms of human communication, just like Opreșan described them, is one of the fundamental ideas of one of the most elaborate studies in the literature about mummers. I am talking about Terry Gunnell's work *Masks and Mummings in the Nordic Area* (2007). It comprises 840 pages representing the outcome of the collaborations of more researchers in Northern European countries including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Greenland and Newfoundland region in Canada. They all present various aspects of the mummers' plays in these countries and regions, offering a comparative perspective of this incredible ritual diversity. Furthermore, the study Gunnell edits proves the incredible isomorphism between mummers in all of these regions, but also between them and mummers in Great Britain. Nordic countries could have offered the British researchers the opportunity to test much more fertile comparisons. We could simply take the instance of *The Christmas Goat*, a dramatic play from Norway (*julebukk*) that is present in Sweden (*julbock*), Denmark (*julebuk*), Finland (*joulupouki*) and Estonia (*naarisokk*), England (the *Hobbyhorse*), Romania (*Capra*) and Russia (*коза*). It is also stimulating to follow the way various symbols and elements of such a folk theater play are activated by certain local cultural patterns, by languages, dialects and cultural rules. However, it seems that all these cannot diminish the striking isomorphism of the folk theater forms found all over Europe, generally called the *Christmas Goat*, the *Dance of the Goat* or simply *The Goat*.

Besides the structuring of all these data – a colossal effort on behalf of the editor – Gunnell's vision opens two perspectives. On the one hand, he revalidates a series of observations of authors who had investigated these rituals before him; on the other hand, he advances a new, innovative interpretation of mummers. For Gunnell, mummers' plays represent a form of communication that involves simultaneously both actor and spectator, enhancing an exchange of diverse information between the two, connecting all the human senses, “including sound (of various kinds), vision, movement, touch, smell, rhythm, tone, deep mental association, prior expectation and more” (Ibidem 2007:29). Because of this, one of the apparently simplest forms of theater becomes in fact “one of the most complex cultural phenomena known to humankind” (Ibidem 2007:28).

More than that, the recent evolution of mummers' plays from community ritual forms to national and global level due to their transformation in commercial heritage or embodiments of local or national political agendas, turn them into cultural forms that are even more complex than when they belonged just to the community performing them. Therefore, the research of mummers today, in their community/ heritigisation/ marketization

context, could reveal an entire series of local, national and global social expressions that would be difficult to seize if they were viewed from another perspective. The cause lies in the fact that today's rural communities or small urban communities are not similar to the ones few decades ago; today's integration into the globalization process by means of television, internet networks and radio, influences the entire behavior of both performers and viewers.

Another study trying to comprise some of these aspects was written by anthropologist Gerald Creed. From the start, Creed observes that the behavior and look of the mummers reveal something ancient, but rejects this hypothesis that would bring him closer to Frazer's anthropology; instead, he builds a demonstration of exactly the opposite – the mummers are an expression of modernity, although actually an expression of “just modernity in premodern drag” (Creed 2011:216). To finish his demonstration, Creed takes a journey to a series of Bulgarian postsocialist localities where mummers' rituals and folk festivals take place. The mummers' manifestations help Creed touch on many important aspects related to mummers' play, including sexuality and gender, masculinity, civil society, democracy, nationalism and interethnic relations. They all form the lens through which Creed tries to decipher the transformations of the Bulgarian society after the fall of communism.

A valuable distinction made by Creed, based on the data in the interviews with the participants, is operated between mummers' rituals in their native villages and mummers' festivals in urban areas. This distinction stands for two totally different cultural expressions, and could be the key to understanding Creed's demonstration. Unfortunately, this dichotomy is not rigorously mentioned throughout the entire study. Thus, from the very beginning we are told that, in some places, these practices are spreading, whereas in others they are gradually vanishing (Creed 2011). But the author does not mention which are actually the ones expanding and which are the ones vanishing. Neither do we know whether the author refers to mummers' festivals in urban areas or in village rituals. We could deduce that he is talking about the ones in the first category, and this could be connected precisely to the peasants' “cultural dispossession” of their own cultural heritage because of its exportation to the urban world and its transformation into something totally different from what it had been initially. But this idea remains pending and is not clearly expressed; it rather makes us believe that the dispossession is somehow the result of the postsocialist mess where the promise of the country's development and modernization are only hopes. These hopes were never

accomplished completely during the long transition to market economy. More, the two types of rituals are regarded as being “interactive and reinforcing” (Idem 2011:56).

In this vaguely defined landscape, mummers would represent an alternative modernity able to replace or to feel like having replaced the aggressive modernity that eviscerates cultural practices (Ibidem 2011:216). The only problem that makes it difficult to understand such an assertion is the fact that *mummers* could hardly represent an alternative modernity as long as they are actually one of the cultural realities the peasants are dispossessed of in postsocialism. This dispossession is because of the interference of numerous consequences including the lack of jobs, the expansion of alternative entertainment forms, the demographic decline and the migration to Western European countries. So, one could wonder, how could a cultural reality – mummers – be an alternative modernity for postsocialism when it is actually one of the cultural phenomena eviscerated by the troubled postsocialist transition to capitalism? The final conclusion of the study follows the same line: mummers manage to survive in front of the postsocialist corrosive modernity by means of carnivalization, displacement from the village world and commercialization – the price for losing the potential alterity they could have represented. “It is now just modernity in premodern drag” (Ibidem 2011:216), the author tells us. Through this conclusion, Creed’s work could be placed at the opposite side of the originist authors who considered mummers to be surviving elements of eras long gone. In this study, mummers became just a deceptive expression of modernity (because of the mask they wear) – a modernity that is as real and visible in spite (or perhaps because) of its negative aspects for contemporary Bulgarian society.

Finally, moving beyond these more or less convincing conclusions, the most valuable direction provided by this study is the extensive fieldwork based on participant observation and extended interviews with the participants themselves. All these prove the special meaning that joining these plays has for the villagers, particularly when the rituals happen within their own communities. The value of mummers’ plays is probably most obvious in an interview to a villager who declared, inverting the terms of the equation between mummers and reality: he is a mummer all year long and, two days each year, during the holidays, he is a human being and a person (Ibidem 2011:63). His statement and other similar ones, excellently observed and exemplified by Creed, represent something essential for mummers’ plays, something we are going to explain in the next section of this chapter.



#### **D. Language Games, Mind Games and Mummers' Plays – Mummers' Plays in Modern Societies**

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have provided a synthesis of a whole century of attempts to observe, describe and understand the complex reality of mummers' plays, using the rational patterns of social sciences. These repeated attempts to understand mummers through a general concept or an explicative theory that would cover all their diversity benefitted mostly from a limited success<sup>46</sup>. The symbols, the representations and the social behaviors staged by the mummers proved to be extremely diverse and were many times impossible to explain through a single syntagm or a single theoretical framework. An overall view of this literature revealed many times the researchers' discontent with the broad reality of mummers and their plays. This situation did not lead to the results they were seeking, and the scholars who were more cautious and reserved in launching a conclusive theory on mummers were the ones that gained the most. This shows that mummers might have also played a farce on most of those researchers who tried to understand their 'essence' and to comprehend their plays by means of an encompassing theory.

At the end of this chapter, I will try to explain the mummers' plays from a different perspective than the ones that have been proposed so far, and also to answer two extremely important questions that I stated at the beginning of this chapter: how could we explain the enormous diversity of mummers' plays across Europe and the amazing similarities between folk plays at huge distances in time and space? And how could we explain the enormous success of mummers in agricultural societies for centuries followed by the mass extinction of mummers' plays with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution?

In trying to answer these questions, I am going to connect my work to those of three authors who explicitly wrote about the idea of play/game in human culture – Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ioan P. Couliano and Johan Huizinga. None of these thinkers are cultural anthropologists, but philosophers and historians.

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<sup>46</sup> It is edifying to note that a similar effort to circumscribe the idea of play/game in general has been attempted by Roger Caillois (Caillois 1961). Just as in the case of the researchers that aimed to comprise mummers' plays, this attempt has failed, too (Malaby 2009), ending in a taxonomy of human games and a series of largely capitalist-centric, heavily materialistic statements about the idea of play.

Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of the thinkers who, in his research on language, faced a similar – if not identical – problem to the one the researchers of mummies had already encountered: the incredible diversity of human games. In a passage that became famous, Wittgenstein was able to offer an absolutely original perspective on language games, a perspective exemplified in fact by the analysis of games in human society:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? -- Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' " - but look and see whether there is anything common to all. -- For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look! -- Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. -- Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! Sometimes similarities of detail. And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities (Wittgenstein 2010).

Correlated to the previous sections about the mummies' play research, the excerpt we have just read is truly striking. The reason is that, analyzing two different realities – language and mummies' plays – it is easy to observe a series of similar aspects whose correspondence is amazing. And this isomorphism causes even more perplexity since, in order to explain language games, Wittgenstein refers precisely to human games in day-to-day reality. Because of this particular reason, this paragraph – often quoted in philosophy and other social sciences – could perfectly fit the problem we are discussing, namely mummies' plays. Following

Wittgenstein's model, I could generate a series of similar assertions regarding mummers' plays:

Consider, for example, the proceedings that we call "mummers' plays". I mean *Hero-Combat Play*, the *Sword Dance Play*, the *Wooing Play* from England, as well as the *Christmas Goat* from Northern European countries, the *Dance of the Deer* from Moldova, the *Pantomimic Mummers* with their house-visit-in-disguise in Newfoundland Island, and so on. What is common to all of them? – Do not say: "There must be something common, otherwise they would not be called 'mummers' plays' " - but look and see whether there is anything common to all of them. -- For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them with similarities and differences. To repeat: don't think, but look! -- Look for example at Christmas mummers, with their multifarious relationships. Now go to spring mummers like the Romanians' *Călușari*; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, while others appear. When we move further to folk theater with puppets or marionettes, much of what is common is retained, but much is also lost. -- Are they all 'amusing'? Compare the pantomimic mummers with their house-visit-in-disguise, full of joy and amusement, with the folk theater of *Haiducii/The Outlaws*, which are serious and grave from beginning to end. Or, is there always the idea of death and resurrection in all these plays? Yes, indeed, this is a common theme for many of them but many other have never embodied this notion. Now, think of masks. In mummers' plays there are always characters who wear masks, but not all of them do. And there are some folk plays like *Haiducii/The Outlaws* where no character actually wears a mask or just one of them does, like in *Călușari*. And we can identify plays where the performers have their face blackened with soot, again not wearing a regular mask. Look at the parts consisting of verbal plays and of pantomimic ones; and at the difference between oration and action. Think now of plays like the *Christmas Goat*; here is the element of amusement, action and pantomime, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! While the *Christmas Goat* is based mainly on action and pantomime, the *Hero-Combat Play* from England and the *Irod Play*<sup>47</sup> from Romania and Hungary are mainly based on dialogue and oration. Sometimes we see just similarities of

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<sup>47</sup> *Irod* is a folk drama based on the biblical motif of the three Magi from the East who announced the birth of Jesus Christ. It presents a dialogue followed by a sword fight between King Herod who had ordered that all babies younger than two be killed, and the three Magi. This play, really successful among Romanian peasants, was also a symbolic weapon in the Romanians' fight for national emancipation and the affirmation of their national identity, although it seems that it was actually borrowed from other people that used to perform it, too, such as the Hungarians and the Szeklers.

details. And we can go through the many, many other groups of plays just the same way; we can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we are seeing a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities.

What we are actually witnessing when discussing mummers' plays is a long series of "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein 2010[1953]), a complex network of superpositions, differences and complicated relations that make it impossible to produce a totally comprehensive definition or a global theory that could define once and for all some precise conceptual borders. Yet, what we discover in all these manifestations – ongoing or just mentioned in historic documents – is the individual's predisposition to *play* and to dramatize present realities; this happens without the realities preserving a certain pattern, but rather a variety of topics and motifs. And when we are saying *play* we are using the Romanian word *joc* for it. This is because it comprises the whole series of manifestations embodied by this word: game, play, dance, trick, theater and risk.

But let us go back to Wittgenstein and try to understand the relations between his discoveries in the field of language games analysis and their implications for mummers' plays. The basic idea of his *Philosophical Investigations* is that there is no single logic of language; instead, there are multiple ones, depending on the context that produced the language. Precisely because of that, language expressions become a key element of human society since they often help us understand reality and adapt to its demands much better than concepts and theories could. Thus, expressions are strictly connected to the contextual use of language, and language thus becomes a collection of practices that change at the same time with the economic, political and cultural transformations of human society. They represent one of the most important sources of human identity precisely because they have the capacity to create vital connections between the values, the beliefs, the ethics of human communities and the persons comprised in these societies. The expressions also bring important aspects regarding the historicity of any linguistic and cultural community that uses them in daily language, thus becoming a sort of living history of the community. This is why, knowing a language does not guarantee the access to understanding the behavior and human practices of the community. This is because there is no access to the context and the human experience that brings meaning into the expressions, besides one's own living experience in that community. When Wittgenstein speaks about these things, he also offers, perhaps not coincidentally, the example of such a cross-cultural encounter:

One learns this when one comes into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even though one has mastered the country's language. One does not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We can't find our feet with them (Wittgenstein 1967).

This fragment sheds light on a person's limits in crossing cultural barriers and understanding the contextuality involved in the experience of other people who had lived within a community with a history and an economic and political system different from that person's cultural view. That precise contextuality could be expressed by what Wittgenstein called "language game", and language games are components of what he called "life forms". These "life forms" represent a combination of factors such as interpersonal relationships, cultural attitudes and various forms of communication extant within the human society. They are distinct worlds and, if we want to understand them, we have to make them understandable by deciphering the meanings involved by language games and other forms of communication that make people exchange information. Yet, an anthropologist could easily notice that we find ourselves in front of one of the basic concepts of the discipline: the cultural relativism that warns us about the fact that we could not hope to understand a series of cultural aspects in a community unless we applied and used that human society's rules and norms.

Again, it is obvious that Wittgenstein talks in this context rather as a cultural anthropologist than as an analytical philosopher. One of the dilemmas this part of Wittgenstein's work caused is whether there is a single "life form" or a series of "life forms." The reason for this dilemma comes from the fact that the Austrian thinker used the expression in both singular and plural. Jesús Padilla Gálvez, one of the philosophers who tried to find the meaning of this fragment, argued that "the language games that we use in our actions are embedded in a form of life." (Gálvez and Gaffal 2011). Gálvez assumption is that what Wittgenstein called "life forms" are entities similar to the anthropological concept of cultural forms, this time understood from the perspective of the analytic philosophy as media where various forms of communication and exchange of ideas happen, based on a routine and, therefore, on certain rules and norms inscribed in the community's traditions and history; through their constant use, they generate speaking, nonverbal and behavioral habits, etc.

Drawing a parallel between Wittgenstein's discoveries about language games and the multifarious reality of mummers, we see incredible similarities that language analysis and mummers' plays' analysis reveal to us. Just as language games talk to us about the cultural contextuality, mummers' plays speak about their place within the cultural context of the customary community that produced them. More, mummers' plays speak about the existence of more complex communication needs between the members of the small village communities where the individual's life had limited connections with the outside world. Therefore, the context of the mummers' plays is not a nation or a continent – as some researchers believed – but a customary community, a human group connected to a specific cultural milieu and which is not completely isolated, but always connected to other surrounding areas by means of various commercial, geographical and cultural connections that has guaranteed the transmission of information over time. Thus, mummers' plays are just as convincing for proving the contextuality of a “life form” as language games. Precisely because of the contextual particularities of these “life forms”, mummers' plays cannot be explained by a single general concept, as it was repeatedly the case through the use of definitions, typologies or theories meant to bring everything under the same large umbrella.

Consequently, if we follow the history of small agriculture communities, both in Europe and in other areas of the globe, we see how mummers' plays have been used to satisfy an extremely varied array of human needs. And what Wittgenstein stated regarding the language is equally valid for mummers' plays. In the agricultural societies, they represented complex communication means between the individuals and their village community, at the same time being part of the way people organized their community life. These situations can range from very simple to extremely complex, and have also been discussed in detail in the second and the third chapter of this work. For the time being, we can only enumerate few of the human needs, wishes and problems expressed by the mummers' plays: creating a connection to those members of the community with which relations are sparser throughout the year; extending the social network beyond the family circle; finding a spouse; understanding universal issues such as death, sickness, or social problems such as poverty and social inequity; cementing a community identity; realizing a bridge to the community's past; creating some reference points on the collective memory map; reinforcing the sense of belonging to the community; the temporary trespassing of certain social barriers that seem too rigid; satirizing flaws and personality features of certain community members; restating one's ego sometimes even violently; collecting money from the community members;

satisfying the entertainment and relaxation needs; articulating/aleviating conflicts/animosities between individuals or groups inside the community. For all these reasons, mummers' plays seem to be expressions of those entities Wittgenstein called "life forms", which I called *cultural micro-ecosystems*.<sup>48</sup> Even more, mummers' plays speak about the indissoluble connection between human language expressions, always adapted to a specific cultural context, and human experience. The plays in general, as well as language games are also perfectly adapted to the cultural ecosystem that had produced them.

Despite the emphasis on the indissoluble relation between language games and the individual's attachment to the specificities of a cultural universe, Wittgenstein was not interested in explaining the relation between these games, human mind and, above all, the power relations that were always present in the history of human civilization. This relation is explained by another author – Ioan P. Couliano – in his work *The Tree of Gnosis* (Couliano 1992). This historian of religion speaks about the theological debates between Gnosticism/Western Dualism on the one side, and Christianity on the other side – debates that led to the official establishment of the Christian doctrine. Unlike other historians of religion, Couliano advances a new methodology; with it, all the theological debates about the Creator of the World and of the world's principles seem to be the expression of certain "mind games people played with one another for centuries" and that almost resembled chess games and, thus, should not have affected the players negatively. The reason it that they had no rule for checkmate, so they could not be won by anybody. "Yet they nevertheless accomplished the moral and physical destruction of many, and were won by an exercise of power" (Couliano 1992:267).

Couliano explains here the logic of the relation between historicity and the rules of the human mind functioning when it is guided by the game's logic. Above all these, one can notice how arbitrary aspects of existence overlap – including the historic and social contingency. Couliano talks about the institutional aggressiveness through which some of our fellows, mesmerized by the exercise of power in stratified human societies, have destroyed

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<sup>48</sup> Referring to this concept, we could not disregard the parallel between the difficulty of Wittgenstein's definition – alternating permanently between using the expressions "life forms"/"life form" – and the debates in recent works from the science of ecology that oscillate between defining a community of living organisms through their relations with the local system and treating the whole planet as a huge ecosystem, therefore as "ecosystems"/"ecosystem". Similarly, in cultural anthropology it is difficult to indicate where the limits of a certain culture start and where they end. A national culture, for instance, always comprises small local and linguistic cultures appearing as tens and sometimes hundreds or thousands of local dialects and folk cultures that are difficult to bring together under the umbrella of a single cultural form.

what was essentially something purely harmless – the human propensity for playing with concepts and ideas. Another possibility could have been to position themselves inside the framework of a game and by getting involved in it, but this rarely happened. In fact, playing these kinds of games could have been, for human beings all over the planet, a way of understanding the complexity and diversity of other people’s economic, social and political reality. The idea of freedom was presupposed by the game, opposing from the start the obedience of rules that had been pre-established by individuals and institutions belonging to “life forms” or cultural ecosystems different from the ones the players were part of and most of the time superordinated to them. Here is what Couliano says about this:

A game fascinates the human mind because the mind recognizes in it its own functioning, and this recognition does not depend on the kind of game offered to the mind. The logic of any game is to set before the mind a multiple-choice scheme. The mind will immediately set upon its task of exploring all these possibilities.

Theoretically, it should do no more, but in practice the human mind is always faced with situations in which, among a plurality of solutions, only one or some are correct, and the incorrect ones may prove fatal. This probably explains why the mind will tend to cling to one choice instead of accepting many of them, but complex social interaction is certainly another reason (Couliano 1992:247).

In his work, Couliano refers to a single historic example that expresses mind games – the theological-hermeneutical debates about the Bible. But he is aware that the areas standing for the use of these expressions are multiple. I believe that one of the most convincing examples in this respect is represented by mummers’ plays. When I am thinking to all these *plays* I have in my mind the Romanian word *joc* since it expresses all the meanings involved by mummers’ plays: game, play, dance, trick, theater and risk. The Romanian language has the advantage, at least in relation to English, that the word *joc* involves all the multiplicity of meanings that a whole sum of English words holds. Therefore, in any Romanian-English dictionary, the word *joc* is translated into several English words such as *game, play, acting, sport, dance, pastime, recreation, lost motion*. In this dissertation, I opted for the translation of the *Jocul Caprei* and *Jocul Cerbului* through *Dance of the Goat* and *Dance of the Deer*. But it is obvious that this translation is imperfect, as it is impossible to find in English a word that embodies the whole range of meanings involved by the word *joc*.



Besides this, the huge area these mummers' plays cover makes me also think that we are not talking about arbitrary social events, but about an expression of something that lies deeper in the human mind – what Couliano calls mind games, an expression of what Liénard and Boyer called “cognitive architecture” (Liénard and Boyer 2006). These mummers' plays embody various ways of approaching reality and responses to purely human problems just as language games – long theorized by Wittgenstein – are used by humans to express various aspects and ideas of the cultural micro-ecosystem where humans live their life. The individual is essentially a cultural being which uses *play/joc* to organize and understand a reality of much diversified symbols and representations.

For all these reasons, understanding mummers' plays and their particular cultural meaning represents an immense reflexive effort, and demands much more energy, knowledge and wisdom than the brutal attempt of subordinating them to a thinking system that belongs to another cultural ecosystem. I am stating this because the thorough understanding of the significance of mummers' plays as they are for a community could only be possible through a long coexistence of that person with the members of the community performing them. This is because mummers' plays represent a part of a cultural micro-ecosystem, as it also resulted from the previous chapters of this study. But if we followed European history, we would rather see a picture of coercion and violence rather than one of tolerance and understanding regarding mummers' plays. The brutal ecclesiastical interdictions of folk plays went hand in hand with the attempts to subordinate them by means of an official and institutionalized discourse (M. Pop 1976). In fact, ecclesiastical interdictions regarding mummers' plays developed in parallel with the progressive spread of the onstage theater, the emergence of professional actors and the commodification processes affecting certain forms of folk theater without stage that used to be the invention and the collective attribute of small (agricultural) communities where humans had been living for millennia. The separation between actants and spectators after the spread of staged performances also represented, among many other implications, an expression of the social inequalities and progressive degradation of the community model where humans lived throughout most of their existence as species.

Language games and mummers' plays, both expressing the human mind games and the *ludens* nature of the human being, were harmless ways for the human mind to evolve inside the social, political and economic framework of a community. Why were they considered a menace and for whom? The easiest and most obvious explanation is that all

these games have permanently embodied an expression of the human spirit's freedom which does not need any stage or lights to express itself; instead, it only needs a human community. This assumption was made by few authors who had studied the topic and who, in most cases, reached the conclusion by traveling different roads (see Bakhtin 1984[1968]:7; Helm 1969:6; Glassie 1975:93). In Couliano's view, this tendency is not at all accidental. He compares human's speculative systems and doctrines in various contexts with the random combinations of the colorful cubes of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Just like these colored cubes, doctrines, and theories, like 'bricks' that seem to have nothing to do with each other, come sometimes together in strange shapes and create edifices that can resemble enormously between them, even if they are separated by great distances in space and time. This does not prove their common origins, as believed by Belgian scholar Franz Cumont, who struggled for a long time trying to prove that all beliefs in metempsychosis came from India and that Greek Pythagoreans brought them from Iran (Couliano 1992:56).

What political and religious authorities of the past had to suppress was precisely this freedom of human mind, since the individual with a free mind and a free behavior could neither be controlled, nor manipulated by the official doctrine and ideology. Yet, when the masses could not be controlled, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to build institutions that also aimed at imposing and maintaining a set of social inequities. In the past, mummings' plays have always been community plays. Therefore, the history of their interdiction is, in fact, the history of the subordination of human communities by leviathan-like institutions, be they religious or statal. This trend was well observed by Thomas Malaby, an important author in the *Anthropology of Play* field, when he stated that: "The disposition of play is, in many ways, the latest sentiment to have been turned into the object of institutional desire" (Malaby 2009:216).

The incredible extension of mummings' plays all over the world and across all cultures makes me believe there is an organic relation between the human mind and the human *plays/joc*. All these realities could be explained through the existence of "specific aspects of human cognitive architecture" that make people be attached to rituals (Liénard and Boyer 2006). The same thing seems to apply to *plays/jocuri* in general. In fact, the play and the ritual had a close connection within agricultural societies. The members of these societies were always involved in routine work related to field activities. Their daily habits followed very regular patterns. In the absence of *plays/jocuri* that made this life more entertaining and in the absence of rituals that created landmarks on the map of human memory, human

existence risked becoming uniform and monotonous and human society risked become amorphous. That is why, in these communities, mummers' plays were some of the elements of culture that made life more pleasant, more exciting and less dull. Moreover, the role of the ritual was to regulate the relationship of these plays with the members of the village community, creating only certain intervals when they could be practiced. In the absence of these intervals regulated by the laws of tradition, the human mind's tendency to engage in the game and to follow its logic could become an unstoppable stream. If play is an indispensable element present in the cognitive architecture of the human mind, and mummers' plays are a cultural expression of this essential aspect, how could one explain the mass extinction of mummers' plays with the advent of the industrial revolution?

William O. Beeman made the astute observation that the “[m]ost elaborate theatrical activity seems concentrated in agricultural societies” (Beeman 1993:385). Nevertheless, with the advent of the industrial revolution, the mummers do not play the same role as before. The agriculture communities became insular and lost their community spirit and community lifestyle. The problems of people within these communities were being solved more and more by state-led institutions and much less by the communities' rules and traditions. At the same time, the relationship between the human mind and the game begins to be satisfied by the incredible development of technology in the 20th century. With the 19<sup>th</sup> century already, some other kind of communities than those existing until that date appeared. The emergence of the print-languages that “laid the bases for national consciousnesses” (Anderson 2006[1983]:44), of mass-sports, together with the professionalization of different plays that eliminated the “the real play-spirit” (Huizinga 1968[1938]:199), the growing success of television (Bruckner 2007[1995]:69), the primacy of the image transmitted via television in front of the written word (Sartori 2005[1997]:17-21), and finally the appearance of the smartphone, more often connected to the Internet, have created a number of (virtual) communities that did not exist before.

Last but not least, the relationship between the human mind and the game is also more often satisfied virtually, and especially through computer games. The relation of humans to computer games is one of the dilemmas expressed by Malaby at the end of a challenging article where he states: “What is most provocative about the current moment, then, is how the explosion of thoroughly digitized games prompts us to confront the play element and its powerful yet indeterminate relationship to the emergent cultural form of computerized games” (Malaby 2009:216).

As absurd in terms of scenario and action as mummings' plays, video games fascinate the human mind. A rational and outward reflection on games such as *Mario*, *Sven*, *Captain Novolin* or *Darkened Skye* makes one wonder about the mental health of those who created them. But at a closer look, they exploit topics such as sexuality, violence, illness, death and the fight between good and evil - universal human themes that have actually been explored by most of the mummings' plays. The most striking aspect of them is that, once one starts playing and getting involved in these games, one gets caught up in their internal logic and the absurd elements of their scenarios disappear right away.

Some of these games, such as *Counter-Strike*, have succeeded in creating virtual communities with millions of members that organize online competitions with prizes, regular meetings in cyber-space and virtual networks with practitioners in various corners of the world who play the game together. Finally, games with huge popularity like *Pokemon* have been the subject of moral dilemmas and controversies in various countries on the globe. The game has been accused of promoting cruelty against animals, promoting violent, occult and anti-Christian themes, or using symbols that contradict the doctrines of various religions such as Buddhism, Judaism and Islam. All this culminated in the law banning the game in Saudi Arabia in 2001 on the grounds that it promotes several themes and symbols that are against Muslim faith (www.express.co.uk, July 21, 2016).

All of these episodes remind us of the outsiders' misunderstandings regarding mummings' plays throughout history. As certain authors stated (Du Cange 1678; Pop 1976:184), these folk plays were perceived as absurd and irrational and their practice has always awakened negative feelings and inflammatory accusations from those who have lived away from these practices. Just as today, when powerful state institutions have tried to ban the practice of certain computer games, the ecclesiastical institutions of the Middle Ages have tried to stop mummings' plays through various decrees. As we know, their success has been extremely limited, similarly to nowadays when any severe criticism of state or church institutions against computer games has led to significant increases in the games' global number of players.

The analogy between video games and mummings' plays could continue. In my fieldwork, my interviewees have always talked about their addiction to mummings' plays. "These customs are like bacteria. Once they caught you, you cannot get rid of them anymore! More than that, you start contaminating other people too", Constantin Hâra from Heleşteni

once told me (March 27, 2012, Oboroceni village, field notes). Another interviewee in Crasna, Ukraine, made a similar statement: “Our *Malanca* is like a microbe or a kind of addiction if you want. Once it touches you, and especially if you are born here, you are contaminated forever” (Gheorghe Gherman, 28 years old, Crasna village, Ukraine, Interview). The same way, video games generate dependence and sometimes even a damaging addiction affecting the mental health of individuals. Well, at this point, the series of analogies between the mummers’ plays and the games produced by modern technology are breaking apart.

In the past, mummers’ plays were regulated by tradition and their practice was only ritualistic. Any transgression in this respect was harshly charged or even punished by the community. The community established the place and date of the performance of these rituals, and the individuals addicted to them had to wait for a full year to enjoy playing them just for a few days (Pop 1976:86). As we have seen in the first chapters of this work, mummers' plays always involved a collective way of action and a set of complex cultural expressions. These, in turn, involved ways of organizing and acting in groups and only through the contribution of the village community. With the disappearance of subsistence agriculture as a mode of production, the mummers' plays have started to dissipate too, as they were part of this system. Moreover, with the replacement of mummers' plays with modern forms of entertainment, a dangerous mutation has occurred. If folk plays involved complex forms of communication between the individual and other members of the community, in many of the plays produced by modernity, and especially video games, this element disappears, and human beings become the players of a monadic game of mind.

This analogy between mummers’ plays and video games is meant to show that the vanishing or dramatic decline of mummers after their long-lasting centuries old success in the agrarian societies of Europe and beyond is, in fact, an illusion. Those that have disappeared are actually just the mummers’ plays in the agrarian societies, and not ‘the mummers’ in people's minds. This statement may seem difficult to understand at first glance. But in the light of Wittgenstein's theory, and especially of Couliano, things become clearer. The competition between mummers' plays and video games, is for the same 'patch of land', to use a metaphor. It is about that part of the human consciousness by which humans as social beings are inextricably linked to *play/joc*, in all its forms and expressions, from theater to dance, and from pantomime to competition among participants, based on preestablished rules. Humans' ways of adapting to the surrounding economic, political and social reality are not

infinite, just as the mechanisms of the human cognitive architecture that make this adaptation are not infinite either, even though their expressions seem, and maybe are, infinite, as Couliano states. That is why, at a certain moment, as Couliano argued, these systems tend to overlap in some parts of them. But this overlap is not perfect. In other words, only parts of certain expressions overlap. Those became the similarities that Wittgenstein called 'family resemblances'. But here is what Couliano says about this:

[M]ind games have necessarily similar mechanisms (because the way the mind works and its capacity have remained unchanged for at least sixty thousand years), and therefore systems that have been sufficiently run in time would tend to overlap not only in shape but also in substance. With complex data at hand, we should be able to demonstrate that portions of the map of the Buddhist system would overlap with portions of the Christian system with portions of German idealism with portions of modern scientific thought, because all systems are infinite and tend to explore all possibilities given to them. Accordingly, when sufficiently extended, their maps of reality would certainly coincide (Couliano 1992:268).

As I have underscored in the paragraphs above, the human mind's tendency to theatricalize and play based even on rules that are apparently absurd, has not been replaced by the advent of market economy and consumer culture. Only the place of the mummies' plays in human mind has been taken by other expressions and forms, for example the video games. These *games/jocuri*, accessed anytime and anywhere by means of modern technology - depleted by the rigor of the ritual rules and cycles firmly imposed in the past by the agricultural communities - have quite often turned into a dangerous addiction with harmful effects on the behavior and social life of human beings. Today, with the help of a 'simple' smartphone, people have their own virtual games and virtual communities inside their pockets and nobody can stop them from accessing them anytime and anywhere.

Therefore, in the absence of firm rules implemented by the community, this relation between humans and game may become addictive and pathological. Maybe because of this reason, for many people video games could turn into a dangerous addiction that is defined as an impulse control disorder not involving the use of an intoxicating drug, yet still pathological similar to compulsive gambling (Zamani, Chashmi, and Hedayati 2009). There are hundreds of websites and thousands of medical offices today that offer advice and remedies against compulsive behaviour. Moreover, the addiction to video games is not singular. There is an

entire landscape with this kind of addictions and it also includes the addiction to *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Hi5* and other virtual realities (Turel et al. 2014).

In fact, the transformation of community plays under the pressure of economic, social and cultural factors began long ago. Johan Huizinga talks about the loss of many play-elements characteristic of community life, starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The development of competitions between different teams began to be fueled more and more by the commercial competition and the spirit of professional confrontation which lacks spontaneity and carelessness, killed “the true play-spirit” (Huizinga 1968[1938]:195-197). However, a fact not mentioned by Huizinga is that, for a long time, even these activities used to be regulated by a set of rituals. There are championships with precise schedules and meetings between teams on pre-established dates. All of these have destroyed a significant part of the spontaneity specific to *homo ludens*, but kept the ritual as a regulator of the persons’ access to them. Initially the professionalized sports could only be watched on exact dates and by captivated spectators going through a set of rituals such as walking to the stadium, paying the entrance ticket, waiting for the match to start, etc.

The emergence of television blew up all this scaffolding, and the ones fascinated by sports could always access them. Thus, in the absence of rituals and of accurate dates for viewing them, even modern sports could become a source for the compulsive and unhealthy behavior of their viewers. This fascination, but also the addiction of humans to television and the virtual possibilities it can offer, is passionately described by Pascal Bruckner in his book *The Temptation of Innocence: Living in the Age of Entitlement*:

Anyone who has not experienced the atrocious, the irresistible temptation to spend the whole night frantically surfing from one channel to another, without being able to tear himself away from the ribbon of images, does not understand how strong is the magic in this little window. There is always something more interesting going on at the station than in our life. Television’s hypnotic power lies in the fact that it roasts us with its light like butterflies around a lamp: it produces continuous jets of flowing colors and impressions that we suck down with a never-ending thirst. Television is an animated piece of furniture and it speaks, it serves the function of making dullness bearable (Bruckner 2000).

In line with the same criticism, Giovanni Sartori talks about the humans’ imbecilization through television. Television changes the nature of *Homo Sapiens* and transforms him or her

into a *Homo Videns* by imposing the primacy of the television image, thus predisposing to a lack of reflection:

We are in the full and extremely fast multimedia revolution. A process with many tentacles (Internet, personal computers, cyberspace) which is characterized by a common denominator: tele-view, and thus a tele-living of ourselves. So in this book the fire focuses on television, and the basic thesis is that the video phenomenon turns Homo Sapiens, produced by the written culture, in a Homo Videns, in which the word is deposed by the image. Everything gets visualized (Sartori 2005[1997]:11).

With the advent of television, video games and Facebook-like cyberspace, along with the possibility of having all of them in your pocket and accessible anytime, the ritual and all the rules that come with it have vanished, leaving human consciousness prey to its own tendency to follow the logic of games – of The Game in general. All these have become visible in mummings' plays during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when their patrimonialisation began by means of their exportation to the urban world, on the stages of folklore festivals hosted by large cities in Europe (Neagota and Rus 2016).

Until that time, mummings' plays were a form of communication between two or more people, between the individual and other members of his or her own community, between the individual and the community itself. With the export of mummings' plays on the stages and their migration to the urban world at folklore festivals, the connection between performers and the community disappears (Pop 1976:86). Mummings' plays become nothing but a marketed and televised show, one amongst the many shows presented by television, a moment of entertainment and nothing else. With the even stronger urbanization of the village world, cable televisions, computers and video games have made their presence felt in the villages. Thus, the forms of communication within the community - between the individual and other individuals, between the individual and the community - disappear and the human who is caught up in the logic of this new 'reality' produced by modern technology becomes the prisoner of his/her own mind's game with no other purpose than the *Game Itself*. Besides all these, the participants in these games/plays are no longer the games' creators and the plays/games no longer involve interaction with other people, just as mummings' plays used to entail; instead, they produce a greater isolation of the individuals from the society they live in. If mummings' plays involved the creativity and inventiveness of the participants and also the creation of social-emotional ties with other community members, the involvement in



cyber-space (Sartori 2005[1997]:11) has none of these. The marketization of the play/game has, in many cases, led to the abolition of the connection between the individual and the community, strangling human creativity:

Further research would be needed to evaluate the nature of this ludo-capitalism, but along with the use of games to attempt to colonize creativity, we should also notice the implicit distinction here between “players” and the sponsoring institutions that create the conditions for such play. What we are beginning to see is the bifurcation of creativity, separating those who are creative within a ludic system from those game designers creatively contriving the ludic system itself (Malaby 2009:216),

observed Thomas Malaby in his article *Anthropology of Play: The Contours of Playful Experience*.

The play/game no longer has the function of responding to the problems and needs of the community. It becomes a game for the sake of game itself, and the player becomes an atomized individual, monadic and with his/her contact with the community severed, hence the mental disorders one sometimes suffers from (Zamani, Chashmi and Hedayati 2009).

## **E. Conclusion**

Social Sciences and particularly Rural Studies have not focused on explaining and understanding mummings’ plays in relation with their most loyal practitioners – the peasants. This is because peasants have rarely been credited as having such complex rituals and rich social life. They have rather been described from a Marxist perspective, as a subordinated social class and their underdog position within a stratified society (Shanin 1971:15). The same situation is to be found in the literature about mummings’ plays where debates about the mummings’ origin were predominant, being part of a determinist evolutionary vision about the social progress of human societies. Mummings were generally regarded separately from the rural world and attempts were made to cover them by a single theory or general explanatory concept. Because of this, the relation between rural culture and mummings’ plays has rarely and scarcely been deployed.

But the exploration of folk plays in relation to the small cultural ecosystems that begot them revealed the multitude of social situations they express, as well as their particular character, depending on the cultural, political and economic needs of the community that had

created them. In the meantime, mummers' plays also allowed us to see a series of universal features of human beings including the tendency to theatricalize and the propensity to more diverse ways of communication than just the verbal ones (Gunnel 2007). This analysis, along with parallels from other authors who had investigated human games/plays – such as Wittgenstein, Couliano, Huizinga, Liénard and Boyer, Sartori – emphasized the strong relation between language games, mind games, rituals and the deep structures of the human consciousness.

All these parallels have shown that mummers' plays as compelling collective rituals of peasant societies express a stronger relationship with the deep resorts of human beings than most of the thinkers who have analyzed this subject had imagined (see Liénard and Boyer:2006 821-823). The biggest stake of this chapter was to understand the mummers' power of adaptation and the way they managed to cross the storms of the centuries, being capable to adopt the new rules and principles of modern society. Their transformations could talk about the challenges encountered by human beings when they transitioned from small agricultural communities to urban life. If only a century ago in most places around the globe the mummers were still part of oral cultures and their cultural transmission was made orally, more recently the written word has produced a mutation in the cultural transmission of these practices. The texts that accompany mummers' plays are no longer learned from other human beings, but from a written piece of paper. This era also marks the first attempts to patrimonialize mummers' plays that became increasingly rarer in the modern society. Actually, a tricky and hard-to-solve problem that needed a comprehensive explanation was the fast-pace disappearance of mummers in societies heavily influenced by the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and especially the explosion of increasingly advanced technologies such as television, the internet, video games and virtual communities made possible through *Facebook* and *Twitter*. These recent inventions have led to the slow dethroning of mummers' plays in human society and consciousness, including within less developed agricultural communities.

When, through their extra-somatic means of adaptation, human beings create an invention that brings major challenges to their relationship with the world, there are always critical voices to deconstruct this new type of communication. In his book *Dissemination* (Derrida 1981), Jacques Derrida talks about Plato's work *Phaedrus* which analyzes the dialogue between Theuth, the inventor of the writing, and the King of Egypt. Theuth argues that writing would make the Egyptians wiser and improve their memory. But the king is more

skeptical and claims that what appeared to be a remedy might turn into a poison. Writing can actually lead to memory loss, replacing its dynamic and active life with a prosthesis. The immediate consequence of this is that of eliminating the exercise of mental gymnastics and memory's extraordinary ability to memorize. 'Writing' will produce an alternative reality, creating a non-authentic copy of it and making it even more difficult to comprehend (1981[1972]:96-97). Moreover, this pharmaceutical antidote for memory is actually a counter-remedy because it is essentially an artificial remedy that goes against the normal processes of natural life:

under pretext of supplementing memory, writing makes one even more forgetful; far from increasing knowledge, it diminishes it (Derrida 1981[1972]:100)... Confident of the permanence and independence of its types (tupoi), memory will fall asleep, will not keep itself up, will no longer keep to keeping itself alert, present, as close as possible to the truth of what is (Derrida 1981[1972]:105)... Letting itself get stoned [medusee] by its own signs, its own guardians, by the types committed to the keeping and surveillance of knowledge, it will sink down into lethe, overcome by non-knowledge and forgetfulness. Memory and truth cannot be separated. The movement of aletheia is a deployment of mneme through and through. A deployment of living memory, of memory as psychic life in its self-presentation to itself. The powers of lethe simultaneously increase the domains of death, of nontruth, of nonknowledge. This is why writing, at least insofar as it sows "forgetfulness in the soul," turns us toward the inanimate and toward nonknowledge (Derrida 1981[1972]:100).

Derrida's argument takes place in the context of an analysis of the traditional view on communication. From this perspective, the communication system consists of a sender emitting a series of information and a receiver processing the information and then sending it back, turning himself into the emitter. In the postmodern era, especially through mass-media and video-games, the message reaches the receiver and creates certain opinions and ideas in his/her mind, but the feedback cannot take place in the present time, excluding thus the exercise of participation. This may lead to the passivity of the receiving subject or even to the subject being manipulated for potential political or marketing purposes.

The transformation of mummers' plays over the past two centuries speaks precisely about the radical transformations of human society due to the Industrial Revolution. The mummers attempted to adapt to the working class culture, taking on a range of themes, ideas

and motives from this culture, and becoming less and less a profound and diverse form of communication between the members of a village community. Once integrated into a new economic and social system, mummers have become mainly a way of making money, sometimes even resorting to aggressive and unsociable strategies in order to achieve this goal. This new social landscape was well depicted by Stephen Nissenbaum in his research on *Christmas*, where he also talked about “the insolent and clamorous” journeys of the mummers throughout Boston at the end of 1793, making local authorities ban them finally (Nissenbaum 1996:44). This transition of the mummers from the rural world to the urban one, or even the urbanization of the mummers in their own rural communities under the influence of the modernization, is also marked by a disappearance of the oral transmission of the mummers’ practices, together with the emergence of new themes in mummers’ plays (Oprişan 1965).

In the next chapter, I will talk about the patrimonialization of mummers when national states tried to colonize human creativity (Malaby 2009) by integrating the small rural communities in their organizational structures heavily influenced by national ideology. In many cases, all these processes meant bringing mummers to the stages of folklore festivals held in the cities. This was a phase that coincided with the transformation of the mummers into a simple mass-show in which the spectator no longer participates in the performance of the play, and becomes just a simple consumer.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POLITICS OF PATRIMONIALIZATION IN THE ROMANIA NATIONAL STATE AND ITS EFFECTS ON MUMMERS' PLAYS

#### A. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the transformation of peasant societies when destabilizing forces - accompanying the emergence of the Industrial Revolution and the advent of its industrial mode of production - started to become present under various forms within peasant communities, leading to the mass-extinction of mummers' plays. In this chapter, I am following the journey of mummers' plays starting with the rise of national states in Eastern Europe in the second half of the 19th century. Taking Romania's example, I analyze the patrimonialization efforts led by the Romanian National State ultimately aiming at integrating peasant communities in the gearing of the national state, and transforming peasant identities into one national identity.

In Romania and other Eastern European countries (see for example Stauter-Halsted 2001), in the second half of 19th century and even long after, until the first two decades following World War II, the peasantry still constituted the majority of the population.

After all, on the eve of the Second World War, there was only one industrial country, in addition to Britain, where agriculture and fisheries employed less than 20 per cent of the population, namely Belgium. Even in Germany and the U.S.A., the greatest industrial economies, where the agricultural population had indeed been declining steadily, it still amounted to roughly a quarter; in France, Sweden and Austria it was still between 35 and 40 per cent. As for backward agrarian countries – say, in Europe, Bulgaria or Romania – something like four out of every five inhabitants worked on the land (Hobsbawn 1996:289),

Hobsbawn stated in his book *Age of Extremes*.

For this reason, but also because mummers' plays and other peasant rituals occupy an important place in the peasants' mentality and culture, they have been the subject of appropriation attempts by the states' policies through state ideology, a process that went hand

in hand with the emancipation of peasants and the transformation of their communal identities into one national identity.

In this chapter, I describe the political-cultural processes enhancing the appropriation of a significant part of the rural culture to the benefit of the Romanian national state construction, as well as the way this political-ideological exercise had progressively led to the peasants' dispossession of their own culture and identity. In order to present this landscape, I am going to analyze the way patrimonialization processes was one of the causes that contributed to the disintegration of peasant customary communities together with the transformation of peasants into peasant-workers (Beck 1975).

With this goal in mind, in this chapter I focus mainly on the communist period – when the most substantial transformations of rural culture took place, along with the most aggressive folklorization policies directed towards peasant culture by the Romanian state. For this analysis, I rely on the study of related literature, but especially on press archives, particularly on *Revista Romania/Romania Journal*, a magazine published by *Agenția Română de Presă/Romanian Press Agency* in five international languages (English, French, German, Russian and Spanish), expressing the official vision of the Romanian Communist Party, and distributed in many countries (Appendix G). The investigation of the Communist period is extremely relevant for this study because this period coincided with the massive transfer of rural customs, including the mummers' play, from the village communities to the stages of the urban folklore festivals (Pop 1976). Describing all these processes, I provide a window to the dynamics of power relations embedded in the institutions and networks used by a national state when implementing patrimonialization policies that produced, promoted and disseminated its own “historical” and “cultural” heritage, subsequently becoming an integral part of its “past” and “national culture”.

Especially in the late Communist period, the patrimonialization of folk creations such as mummers' plays did not mean the preservation of these rural cultural forms under threat in a society undergoing major economic and social transformations that imperiled traditional community life. Rather, it was a form of symbolic political manipulation used to acquire political legitimacy (Giurchescu 1987:164). Thus, I will call it *insidious patrimonialization*, a kind of ideological exercise with deep roots in the political realm, with certain negative effects on the peasants' folklore production. Moreover, this type of heritagisation (Bendix 2009:254) through folklore festivals and competitions has had long-lasting effects on

Romanian society and influenced the creative vision and freedom of expression of peasants from rural communities. It remained the model for the Romanian state patrimonialization policies even long after the disappearance of the Romanian communist dictatorship in December 1989.

## **B. The Romanian National State and Its Early Patrimonial Activities**

Romania's first extensive patrimonial activities were strongly connected to its struggle for independence as a national state. The *National Museum* had been founded in 1875, having four sections, one of which displayed the traditional costumes of Romanian peasants. A more elaborate museum - *The Museum of Ethnography and Folk Art* - was set up in 1906, including complete peasant houses and even churches, besides many other objects used by peasants inside their households. All these were considered marks of Romanianness (Petre 2003).

One more time, the Romanian example proves that the rise of ethnographic museums in Europe was closely connected to the projects of building national states and their imagined political community (Anderson 2006:6). This is how one of the most extensive patrimonialization efforts starting in Romania was coterminous with the strengthening of national consciousness and identity, a tendency standing for certain trends in modern national states.

Therefore, the Romanian school of ethnology and folklore had been marked since its inception by biased political visions and sometimes by political agendas accompanying the scientific exercise of patrimonialization. Often, ethnologists were not only scholars, but also agents patrimonializing to the benefit of the national state. This position experienced colder periods in terms of political interference and bias; or, on the contrary, it also went through more obvious intrusions of the political sphere, where the encroachment became plainly brutal, with the scientific efforts moving to the background and ethnology turning into a simple tool in the hands of political leaders.

Just by briefly looking at the ethnology and folklore works written in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a high frequency of use of terms such as *Romanian* and *Romanian people* in the very titles of folklore books becomes common. *The Juridical Customs of Romanian People* (Petriceicu-Hașdeu 1882), *The Holydays of Romanian People* (Marian 1898), *The Customs and Beliefs of Romanian People* (Niculiță-Voronca 1903) are just some of the titles

that marked the guidelines of ethnology and folklore in Romania during those times. It also proves their indissoluble relationship with the Romantic nationalist vision, as well as with the contemporary politically rooted nationalist movements (Dorson 1966). Besides the feeling of irretrievable loss of an important part of rural culture, the patrimonialization efforts of storing and systematizing the ethnographic material in archives, building ethnographic research questionnaires and publishing scientific books bears the inseparable mark of Romanianness. Once again, all these things show that, in Romania, the early patrimonialization effort coincided with the political vision of building the foundation of a national state. Ironically, a folklore comparative approach can reveal that the same peasant customs and rituals that were considered an inseparable mark of Romanianness could also be traced in the case of other neighboring people such as Bulgarians, Serbians, Hungarians and Ukrainians (see Aarne-Thompson international classification system for folktales). Yet, some of them – such as the mummers plays, for example – sometimes looked drastically different even among neighboring villages, as fieldwork revealed (Adăscăliței 1968). All these evidence did not prevent the first ethnologists from creating typologies of habits, customs and lifestyles that expressed the *Romanianness* or the *Romanian national essence* (Petre 2003). In this respect, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup>, the first patrimonialization activities aimed at creating a rural patrimony as a heritage of Romanians. The peasants themselves became a mark of the Romanian identity and a proof of the continuation of Romanian spirituality on the geographical area located between the Danube River, the Carpathians mountains and the Prut River.

Following Romania's unification with Transylvania on December 1st, 1918 – a fact that had to be marked by ethnographic evidence, the study of peasantry within a nationalist framework and inspired by the national idea continued just as strong as before. Thus, only three years after the unification, on June 16th, 1922, the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania was founded. This museum sheltered thousands of artifacts belonging to Romanian peasant culture and was later accompanied by an ethnographic park with dozen of peasant houses moved piece by piece from their villages and reassembled at the periphery of Cluj-Napoca city, the most important cultural center of Transylvania (Petre 2003).

After 1925, with the advent of Gusti's Sociological School, this patrimonialization tendency with a nationalistic orientation continued and developed in parallel with a certain political agenda. Of course, Dimitrie Gusti School was probably the most significant attempt of patrimonialization of rural culture in Romania (Roucek 1938). During this school's



campaign, 626 village monographs were accomplished. Additionally, 5,000 village culture houses were set up together with more than 500 rural schools. Besides, Gusti's Monographic School got involved into an admirable holistic synthesis by scanning the Romanian rural space within its multiple expressions and manifestations. Rural environment was analyzed through four frames of existence – cosmological, biological, physical and historical – that examined the relation between the individual peasant and some other social groups and networks in the village world, as well as between the peasant and religion, folk art, juridical system, moral universe, economy and the peasantry system of values (Mosely 1936). For this reason, the teams of scientists examining the rural world from this broad perspective included not only sociologists, ethnologists and folklorists, but also geographers, jurists, economists and physicians. Certain village monographs were made through the combined efforts of specialists from all these areas. Few examples worth mentioning here are the extensive monographs of the Nereju village from Vrancea region, Drăguș in Olt region and Runcu in the Northern part of Gorj County.

In spite of these remarkable scientific accomplishments, after 1930 Gusti's School was fully funded by the Royal Cultural Foundation Prince Carol mostly because it was used by the Romanian King Carol II in his political fights with rival political movements during the interwar period. King Carol II coopted Professor Dimitrie Gusti in his ideological fight with the extremist organization Iron Guard. This fascist movement started to develop as a paramilitary terrorist group with a nationalistic mystic Orthodox and xenophobe ideology that appealed to many Romanians during those times of economic crisis; at that moment, traditional parties were regarded as corrupt and immoral, whereas Romania was believed to go through a crisis of morality. In this context, Romania's king thought that Professor Gusti and his sociological school could offer an ideological counterbalance against the extremist doctrine of the Iron Guard. This is how, in this political and ideological confrontation, the myth of the saving hero promoted by legionnaires was opposed by the myth of national unity based on rural traditions, coalesced around Carol II who was presented as the king of the peasants, the king of Romanian villages and a guarantor for the promotion of Romanian rural culture and peasants' patrimony (Momoc 2012).

During King Ferdinand's reign, a series of folk festivals had already been created, with a program including the stage performance of plays that normally used to be part of the rural culture. Folk drama groups performed mummers' plays (such as the *Dance of the Goat*) on various national theatre stages throughout the country, including the one in Cernăuți (now

in Ukraine), Bukovina (Beza 1928:28). Carol II amplified these tendencies and sponsored the tours of mummers' bands such as *Călușarii* in international folk festivals like the one taking place in London (Rus and Neagota 2016). All of these events were supervised by folklore and sociology specialists that were often part of the jury, too, evaluating the performances of these folk plays teams. Thus, social science and political actions merged into a cultural-political action. Influenced by the philosophy of Saint Simon, Dimitrie Gusti accepted this vision, agreeing that social science and political actions should go hand in hand to create a common unique goal: the transformation of social reality, beyond its mere observation. Nevertheless, Gusti's School and its rural monographs finally remained a valuable patrimonialization model in Romania and in Europe, too. In this respect, the interference of political agendas into the work of social scientists did not become a hindrance against a valuable scientific orientation (Mosely 1936).

The total interference of politics into the realm of social science was to happen after 1945, with the coming to power of the communist regime. In the first two decades after the establishment of communism in Romania, from November 1946 to March 1965, the Communist Party of Romania, called Romanian Workers' Party, posted an Orthodoxy doctrinaire Stalinist-Marxist vision that was to be felt in culture, all patrimonialization activities included. As historian Cristian Vasile well observed in his wide analysis *Literature and Arts in Communist Romania*, "folklore, as other cultural fields, has lost the national traditional character and gained the deep influence of class struggle" (Vasile 2013:178).

### **C. "Building" Cultural Patrimony during the First Two Decades of Communism**

During the first two decades of communist dictatorship, Romanian peasant traditions were interpreted through a rigid Marxist filter and were regarded as superstitions that needed to be replaced with more progressive mentalities and visions. *The Department of Propaganda and Agitation* of the *Romanian Workers' Party* started to control even the way some peasants' rituals and customs needed to be held during Christmas and New Year. The traditions with religious Christian-Orthodox character were particularly censored in the name of political atheist Marxism, according to which "religion is opium for the people" (Idem 2013:183).

Nevertheless, not all traditions were destined to have the same fate. The communist regime had a well-known ability to carve peasant folklore in a way that fit its interests and came in line with its doctrine. In this context, some folk traditions and customs were trashed

while many other were re-designed in order to perform in the service of the communist ideology. But, generally, the production of folklore was perceived as yet another field where the communist leadership needed to exert its censorship.

The very few scientific patrimonialization actions that existed were implemented through the Institute of Folklore. Unfortunately, this institute was cleansed in a Stalinist fashion, its real professionals and leaders being excluded and some of them even persecuted and imprisoned for years because of trivial reasons (Ibidem 2013:187). Under these circumstances, the campaigns of folklore collection bore the mark of political intrusion and of a narrow Marxist-Leninist materialist orientation involving a series of censorships and carving in the studied social reality.

After World War II, the first extensive ethnographic field research with patrimonial character took place in the most important coal mining basin in Romania: Jiu Valley. This simple fact makes us think of a political order with ideological connotations that came from the top of the power. What else could have been the purpose of studying a local peasant population which, for a hundred years, had already been subjected to cultural amputations and deep integration into the working-class developed by the Austrian Empire in Jiu Valley ever since 1850? (Rus 2003) How else could one explain that the first massive research, sponsored by the Romanian government immediately after World War II, aimed at analyzing particularly the rural population of a mono-industrial area with a mining profile?

Reading the book that followed the field research conducted in two stages (1949–1950, and 1955) we clearly realize that even the purpose of a campaign that seems to be scientific at a first glance was much less patrimonial than it was political-ideological (Dunăre 1963). It was certainly a stratagem designed to show that industrial activity in the area of Jiu Valley is extremely valuable and beneficial even for the native peasants of the region, when in fact industrialization was the one that led to the disappearance of a rural way of life, full of traditions and with a rich spirituality. In this context, a team of seven researchers, conducted by the academician Nicolae Dunăre, tried to force comparisons and rapprochements between the Miner's Day, and a local peasant holyday called *Nedeia Momârlanilor*. Before the start of industrialization in Jiu Valley, this local ritual of the native population called *momârlani* was marked by magical beliefs, rituals and old forms of commerce. At the opposite side, the Miner's Day was a festival designed by Communists for propaganda and promotion of their ideology (Rus 2003).

The results of this ethnographic research, comprised within the pages of a substantial book suggestively entitled *The Folk Art in Jiu Valley*, focused only on the material culture of the *momârlani* people including: folk costumes, household objects, artifacts and tools used by local peasants, household tools and so on. All other aspects of the *momârlani* culture, such as religious and pagan beliefs, superstitions, Christian beliefs and mummers' plays were completely avoided; only aesthetical material productions were highlighted with a clear functional role inside this culture. This part of *momârlani*'s culture was mentioned as being already well-absorbed into the working class culture of Jiu Valley area (Dunăre ed. 1963). All these facts stand for the Marxist-materialist orientation of the patrimonialization activities during the first two decades after the establishment of the communist power. In this respect, the observation made by the historian Cristian Vasile was very astute and conclusive: "The alteration of the folklore took place in stages and a multitude of causes contributed to this process, including the appropriation of folklore in a perfidious way" (Vasile 2013:182). Actually, the concept of Marxist folkloristic was used to describe the new type of patrimonialization approach conducted by state institutions like *The Institute of Folklore from Bucharest* (Fochi 1963:124).

The most important words that could describe the relation of the new leaders with folklore were: control, selection, spectacle and mass culture. Terms like "safeguarding" and "preservation" played a much smaller role in this equation. For this reason, it is more legitimate to talk about an insidious patrimonialization. This type of patrimonialization aimed mainly at shaping the identities of Romanian citizens, mostly peasants on that time, and modeling their consciousness according to the principles of the communist ideology, by using symbols and representations coming from the rural culture; meanwhile, they placed the preservation and safeguarding of the country's patrimony on an almost obscure position.

The biggest hypocrisy in this entire equation was the implementation of the most perverted means of symbolic-ideological control on peasants' life, including their folk creations, while at the same time publicly declaring that folk creations were promoted and taken care of by all means (Georgescu 1959). Whereas extensive social engineering projects like the collectivization of agriculture were designed to change the face of Romanian village, by confiscating the land of the individual peasant owners and building cooperative farms owned by the state in the countryside (Iordachi and Dobrinu 2009), the folk creations of the same peasants were used as a source of inspiration to promote urban spectacles as

expressions of mass-culture opposed to the idea of culture as elites' creation and phenomenon generated by professionals (Georgescu 1959).

From an ideological perspective, one of the most important events was the setting up of the *Amateur Artist Movement* during the first years of communism. This movement had a precise purpose that hit many targets. It controlled both folk production and manifestation, while at the same time ridiculing the work of intellectuals who were involved in activities of cultural creation considered retrograde and bourgeois by communist ideology. In 1956 there were already: "40,000 amateur artistic groups of music and dance whose artistic activities take place in the nearly 13,000 houses of culture in the country" (Romania 7/1956: xlvi). Their activity was defined in relation with the mass culture produced for the Romanian people: "The yearly all-country competitions of the amateur artistic groups are genuine highlights of Romanian cultural life. In the 1956 competitions, 6,000 trade union amateur talent groups embracing 200,000 members, 400,000 strong village artistic groups took part" (Romania 7/1956: xlvi). The activities of the state institutions in the field of folklore had to be subordinated to the *Amateur Artist Movement*. The main mission of state institutions such as *The Institute of Folklore from Bucharest* was to coordinate the activity of the members of the *Amateur Artist Movement* while the huge archive of folklore was to be used just as a source of inspiration for members of this movement (Fochi 1963:125).

The *Amateur Artist Movement* blossomed throughout the entire country as a form of Proletkult promoting the values agreed by the communist ideology and the leaders of the Communist Party. At the same time, the peasant living folk production in the villages was subjected to certain forms of control. Thus, the teams of carols and mummers who used to walk throughout the villages during Christmas and New Year's Eve, were legally obliged to pay a tax to the township hall; in addition, they had to make a list with the members of the team that walked through the village during winter holidays, and to accompany it by a table with everyone's signature. Together with the payment of the tax, this list had to be done at least a couple of days before the caroling event took place. One of my elder interviewees who still had vivid memories of those times provided a comprehensive picture of that particular law and of the reason behind its implementation:

With the arrival of communists to power, and until Communism managed to consolidate its power, people were not allowed to make any public gatherings without authorization. Neither was it allowed to make proms or weddings without

authorization. Basically, the communists did not allow more than three people to gather without the consent of the state authorities. Therefore, a kind of authorization was necessary. For this reason, in our area, the meetings on December 31st, when teams of mummers such as the *Goat, Deer, Bear* teams caroled through the village, etc., all had to get an authorization from the mayor's office. (Mihai Lupu, 74 years old, Ruginoasa village, January 16, 2014, Interview).

It was obvious that the issue of that formal authorization together with the tax paid by practitioners that accompanied that document was aimed at discouraging these activities inside the village or at least at placing them under the Party's restrictive control. Besides this, some forms of carols with Christian and magic meaning were banned altogether, having been defined as superstitions without connection to daily Socialist realities (Vasile 2013:182-183). Just like in the Soviet Union, the only accepted form of art was *Socialist Realism*, incorporating all other artistic expressions, including the traditional ones. Thus, communist leaders wanted to diminish the impact of folklore as living phenomenon, while promoting only those elements of it that were in consensus with the ideology and directives of the Communist Party. In fact, this was the essence of the communist-style folklorization – a sort of transformation of folk creations, repackaging them so that they fit the requirements of stage spectacles, which in turn were used to shape the identities and consciousness of the masses.

In an article published in 1959 in the *Journal of Folklore*, Florin Georgescu extolled stage spectacles by the *Amateur Artist Movements*, considering them a type of movement “that is qualitatively different than everything that had existed before. It is based on tradition, which is still alive and powerful in Romania, it emerges from people and it cultivates its most valuable possession. The entire activity of amateur artists represents in fact a new way of expressing and fulfillment of folklore, next to artistic productions and individual creations” (1959:99). According to Georgescu, folklore needed to adapt to the new Socialist realities and had to be transformed so that it fit the rules of the stage. These were regarded as being more logical and organized than the principles of folk creation performed in villages without strict rules and regulations. Following the new logic, the “new folk creations” had to take into consideration several aesthetic principles required by the stage, mainly the fact that these new creations had been designed for spectators who had certain expectations in relation to them. In this respect, the performances that had to be transposed on the stage needed to be selected and modified according to the new Socialist realities that included not only aspects of village

life, but also features of the expanding urban life of the Socialist Republic of Romania (Idem 1959).

With the picture we have depicted above, one can observe the predilection of the communist leaders for festivalization and for a patrimonialization through the *Amateur Artist Movement* – controllable and supervised by party members – whose productions could follow the directives of the Communist Party and its ideological guidelines. In this new context, folk creation was condemned to lose its autonomy and to be practically integrated within the *Amateur Artist Movement*, a form of cultural production accepted by the country's communist leaders. This also represented the most privileged form of culture promoted and approved by the official power by means of propaganda. For example, *Romania Journal* published many articles about the Romanian *Amateur Artist Movement* promoting “the autochthonous” folklore not only in Romanian cities, but also beyond the country's borders. In a 1958 issue of this publication, we find a detailed description of these activities:

The beauty of the Romanian folk song and dance is well-known in many countries. We would like to mention that this year the Ensemble of the Bucharest People's Council was awarded the first prize at the 5th international folklore competition held as part of the 15th celebration of the "Blossoming Almond" in Agrigento, and the *Ensemble of the Romanian Rail Workers* also received the first prize at the international song and dance competition held in Llangollen-North Wales in 1957. At the same time, different Romanian folk ensembles gave performances in Great Britain, Italy, France, Finland, Switzerland, Chinese People's Republic, German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, United Arab Republic, Lebanon, USSR, Holland, Greece, Turkey, India, Burma, Ceylon, etc., earning the warmest appreciation of the public. To popularize the inexhaustible treasure of the artistic folk creation is the aim of the fruitful activity carried on for several years by the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest (Romania No.23, November 30, 1958:12).

Such kind of official documents give us a glance of the predilection of the official leaders for the transformation of the living manifestation of folk creation into a kind of folklore festivals strictly designed for the eyes of the public, either autochthonous or foreign, according to the party's directives.

In a cultural landscape already outlined by the narrow confines of the Communist-Stalinist ideology, the leader Nicolae Ceaușescu showed up. His personal vision on national

heritage, folklore, culture and national history determined the evolution of the folklorization of peasant creations and of the patrimonialization activities led by the state during the last two and a half decades of communist Romania.

#### **D. “Building” Cultural Patrimony in Ceaușescu’s Neopatrimonial Romania**

##### **1. Ceaușescu’s Neopatrimonial Leadership**

When Ceaușescu came to power in 1965, he soon became a popular leader, mainly after his intervention on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1968 against the Soviet Union’s brutal invasion of Czechoslovakia. He condemned the Soviet Union in harsh terms, a bold and unexpected political move that earned him the sympathy of Western leaders who saw him as a maverick, able to resist Russian hegemonic power. Although this is how he was perceived outside Romania, inside the country he was accumulating power through the elimination of potential political competitors. In fact the Czechoslovakian event that provided him with symbolic capital both in the West and among many Romanians, coincided with the beginning of developing his cult of personality. Ceaușescu used this moment of highest legitimacy to access a set of political assets that formed the foundation for his cult of personality (Marin 2014).

In 1983, Mary Ellen Fischer described how Ceaușescu had managed to build a personalized version of power and to be credited as “an omnipotent and omniscient leader of the Romanian nation” (Fischer 1983). Ceaușescu used his position as a top party leader to continuously change the seats of the Communist Party members in the government and the leadership of the party so that they became dependent on him, never having the chance to create new centers of power that could counterbalance his hegemonic power. The continuous movement of elites from position to position was called “the rotation of cadres” (Nelson 1988:221). By this means, Ceaușescu was able to establish a type of domination that has been called “dynastic socialism” (Georgescu 1987). His extended family and friendship circle had top positions in the Communist Party and government, playing an essential role in the exercise of power (Marin 2014:46). Meanwhile, others were blamed and punished for any failures or system malfunctions (Fisher 1983). It was a clientelist system of power which could only be accessed through a personal relationship with the leader who offered favors in exchange of personal loyalty and faith in him as a supreme leader (Marin 2014:46).

Ceaușescu liked to have the last word in making political decisions, even when his statements contradicted existing decrees and laws already stated. He was erratic and



unpredictable, sometimes changing his mind at the last moment and blaming the administrative personnel responsible for implementing laws. The historian Cristian Vasile described a moment when Ceaușescu seemed to agree with the name given to the new National History Museum of Romania that had already been used in some documents. “Nevertheless, in less than ten days ... [he] modified even the title of the new museum, which was similar with changing the content of a normative document” (Vasile 2015:50).

He also liked to intervene in fields that he knew little about, such as economics, where he frequently emphasized the need to replace imported foreign products with autochthonous ones, to reduce imports (Betea, Mihai, and Țiu 2015). Especially regarding culture, Ceaușescu enjoyed imposing his own vision and giving orders about which aspects of national history needed promotion and how to do it, what movies should be produced and what writers should be rewarded (Idem 2015). As Cornel Burtică, the Minister of Foreign Trade remembers, Ceaușescu became indignant whenever his image failed to appear on a national TV broadcast or his orders were not accomplished according to his directions (Chelaru 2001).

The above examples all support the idea of Ceaușescu’s regime as neopatrimonial domination. But one aspect is even more interesting. Katherine Verdery theorized the three most widespread modes of controlling populations during communism: remunerative (material rewards, such as raising salaries), coercive (use of force) and symbolic-ideological (moral incentives and symbols) (Verdery 1991:85-86). Verdery observed the Romanian dictator's predilection for the third mode of control. In order to use a symbolic-ideological mode, Ceaușescu had to rely on a kind of ideology that would be understood and happily accepted by the masses because it had a long tradition in Romanian history and culture (Verdery 1991:85). That ideology was national-communism. Several comparative studies stated that, after 1964, the national-communist doctrine was promoted not only in Romania but also in other communist states with a strong autocratic component that were looking for “better social stability” (Soulet 1998:156). In Romania, a main component of this ideology was folklore.

## **2. The psycho-dynamics of Ceaușescu’s relation with culture and folklore**

Political scientist Anneli Ute Gabanyi examined how Romanian cultural patrimony was managed during Ceaușescu’s time (Gabanyi 2003:131-142). She found out that few funds had been allocated to restore historic buildings and monuments. Some important

institutions, including *The Direction for National Cultural Patrimony* had been dissolved with no stated cause, and its cultural and material assets were integrated into a new institution with multiple purposes, where patrimony played a secondary role. Major problems regarding the restoration of historic buildings and monuments had been passed to local administrations that did only the most urgent reparations. Even some apparatchiks started to complain in official newspapers about the pitiful state of certain historical monuments, mainly those with religious significance and function such as the Moldavian monasteries. Gabanyi explained this situation as resulting from Ceaușescu and his wife's lack of interest in culture (Idem 2003:131-134). Indeed, videos from the dictator's personal archive show Ceaușescu and his wife playing backgammon, volleyball, having fun with their dogs or hunting, but never reading books or being involved in intellectual activities ("Lucruri Nestiute din Viata Sotilor Ceausescu - YouTube" 2017).

Ceaușescu's limited formal education - he had only attended elementary school - and lack of appreciation for the products of high culture may have made him permanently resentful towards intellectuals whom he regarded with suspicion and as potential opponents of his power (Betea, Mihai, and Țiu 2015). This could have made him feel inferior to high level intellectuals, spurring him to find a counterbalance to the gaps in his education. The counterbalancing element was to be found in peasant folklore.

Ceaușescu had been born in Scornicești, a village in the southern part of Romania where local mummers like the *Călușari* teams, funerary rites and Christmas carols were still vibrant in 1929 when, aged 11, he left his home in search of a job in Bucharest. Ceaușescu was knowledgeable in folk creation from his experience in the countryside as a peasant child. This could explain why the communist leader placed so much weight on folklore. Just as Dumitru Popescu, one of Ceaușescu's closest collaborators and a propaganda leader of his cabinet, remembers:

N.C. strongly believed that folk production was an inexhaustible phenomenon, a strong stream that would spring in all epochs and all social environments especially if it was stimulated and directed. The danger of a folklorization of the entire culture was merged together with the strange idea of a continuous competition between the inspired folk people and the fastidious art professionals who were less receptive to the political enthusiasm and perhaps less endowed than amateur artists (Popescu 2006:10).

How exactly did the rural values that shaped Ceaușescu's moral behavior during his childhood and the urban principles he discovered when he went to the capital merge together to create the intellectual horizon that later shaped his decisions as a Communist Party leader? This is a question that requires much attention as it has been little analyzed so far.

Several articles in peasant studies and the anthropology of values discuss the ambivalence and confusion generated in peasants when the narrow perspectives and values acquired in small rural communities clash with the more liberal values and relations found in cities (Kluckhohn 1951:405). Urban human relationships were more abstract as a result of the market economy, making peasant reciprocity and attachment to community norms look obsolete and anachronistic (Redfield 1969:77; Bourdieu 2008:186). In any case, the social universe that Ceaușescu discovered as a teenager when he went to Bucharest – a high metropolis called “little Paris” during the interwar period – was totally different from what he experienced in his small, undeveloped southern village. It would be natural for him to have felt small and insignificant in an industrialized capitalistic society where low-skilled workers were easily replaceable.

Gail Kligman hypothesized that the young Ceaușescu was instinctively looking for a family that he found in the clandestine Communist Party of Romania:

[t]he psychodynamics of Ceaușescu's childhood within his natal family collided with the psychohistory of his rule over his natal family. *Tradition* was destined to battle with Ceaușescu's version of modernity... Paradoxically, Ceaușescu brought village values to bear upon the organization of the Party/State planning at the same time the extinction of the village social organization in which these values were sacrosanct (Kligman 1998:30-31).

Rural traditions were used to work to the benefit of the nationalist-communist ideology. They were expelled from their villages, severed from their previous community function and meaning, and exported to urban stages as purely aesthetic spectacles (Pop 1976). The stratagem of using folklore as an ideology allowed Ceaușescu to consolidate his position as leader by subordinating professional artistic creation to the *Amateur Artist Movement*. Thus, he built a more personal relation with the masses, a neopatrimonial form of domination in which folklore represented a main component of his favorite symbolic-ideological mode of controlling the masses. The process was terribly fast in relation with the huge task. Nevertheless, more than a decade was needed to transform the frugal stage spectacles of the

*Amateur Artist Movement* into the extravagant and opulent production of mass-spectacle *Song to Romania* glorifying the country's supreme leader in the late 70s and the entire decade of 80s. I was able to identify three phases in the evolution of these stage spectacles and Ceaușescu's relation to folk creations.

The first phase starts just after Ceaușescu became the top leader of the Party in March 1965, and ended in July 1971. The second started in July 1971 when Ceaușescu launched a mini-cultural revolution – emulating the Korean and Chinese versions of the cult of personality – and a program later called the *July Theses*. This phase ended in October 1976. The third and final phase began when the *National Festival "Song (of Praise) to Romania"* was launched at the end of 1976, ending in December 1989 when both Communism and Ceaușescu regime collapsed during the first days of the Romanian December Anti-Communist Revolution.

### **3. The first phase of Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial regime's relation with peasant folklore (March 1965 – July 1971)**

Initially, Ceaușescu's contribution to reshaping Romanian folklore was similar to that of the previous communist leader. Basically, he inherited the *Amateur Artist Movement* from Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, his predecessor, to which he added a more nationalistic component. This was not a surprise as Gheorghiu-Dej had been distancing himself from Moscow's domination, in part by emphasizing autochthonous national values during his last year of leadership. From 1965 to 1971, Ceaușescu added to this movement only by increasingly emphasizing its national character and expanding it throughout the country (Vasile 2015).

Ceaușescu introduced his vision for artistic production just two months after reaching the top of the Communist Party. Emulating Stalin, one of his role models, Ceaușescu organized a meeting with the "men of culture and art" on May 19<sup>th</sup> (Romania, May 25, 1965:3). This recalled the meeting of Joseph Stalin with writers at Gorky's house on 26 October 1932, where the supreme leader of Soviet Union had expressed his preference for Socialism realism, a kind of art depicting the realities of the socialist society. In Stalin's view, writers, painters and other artists should be "engineers of the human soul," helping to create "the new man" of socialist society. Thus writers, and other artists, were expected to surrender their elite role and bend their efforts to the socialist cause like other

workers, the only difference being that they would produce “literary goods” rather than material products (Rappaport 1999:81). Ceaușescu clarified his similar view on the role of art in the Romanian socialist society:

Men of letters and art are the sons of their times, active participants in the building of the new world, in the spiritual life of society. The art which expresses the ideals of the people is always appreciated by the people, it helps the people reach new levels of knowledge. A production characterized by a poor social content and a low artistic level is short-lived and does not fulfill the mission that literary-artistic creation should have and we wish it had. We are for a realistic art – expression of our socialist society, for an art which by its optimism and vigor should represent our times and where the life and aspirations of the Romanian people should be vibrant. Like in other domains of activity, in this domain, too, different views are facing one another; moreover, you know that the arts have always developed under the conditions of the struggle between the new and the old, especially of the struggle between realism and various other opposite trends. But ultimately, asserting themselves have been the works sprung from the realities of the time that identified themselves with the strivings of the given society. The greatest men of art have championed and defended realism” (Romania, May 25, 1965:3).

Besides the Socialist Realism and the creation of a new man by means of art – both of them elements of a pure Stalinist-Marxist perspective – Ceaușescu added a nationalist component:

All our people highly appreciate the valuable works of Eminescu, Caragiale, Alecsandri, Bolintineanu, Coșbuc, Sadoveanu, Rebreanu, Goga, Grigorescu, Enescu, Brâncuși and of others forming not only a treasure of our national culture, but also an asset of world culture, enhancing the prestige of our homeland abroad. The men of letters and art are called upon to continue and carry on these traditions, to make their contribution towards enriching our national culture and, at the same time, to do their share of world culture (Romania, May 25, 1965:4).

During Ceaușescu’s leadership, a new tradition was inaugurated. As top Party leaders were visiting cities and villages throughout the country, *Amateur Artist Movement* teams would perform for “honorable guests.” Between May 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, during the first such visit of the Party and state rulers following Ceaușescu’s becoming top leader, in the regions of Iași and

Suceava, the following was reported: “After visiting the monastery, the guests went to Putna village where they watched, in the heart of nature, at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, a folklore performance presented by 1,000 amateur artists from the region’s villages and towns” (Romania, June 15, 1966:6).

In the area of Iași, I interviewed Aurel Ardelean, current director of the *County Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture*. He has been working in the field of folklore since he was a young man in the 1970s, and had learned from his older colleagues and their articles about the early history of folklore movement in Iași County. He explained how, soon after Ceaușescu had become Romania’s political leader in 1965, annual local folklore festivals were established in his area:

The first annual festivals of folklore in Iași County were set up at the end of the 60s. The first one started in 1966 in the *comună* of Strunga and was called *The Moldavian Rose*. The second one started one year later in the cultural centre of the county, Iași city. This one was called *Winter Traditions and Customs*. Since then, they both continued except for a short period after the fall of communism when people perceived these customs as a continuation of Ceaușescu’s cult, which was not true. In the first years, the only folk creations admitted in these festivals were songs, dances and some folk theatre. Nevertheless, not all rituals belonging to this last category were performed on stage. The teams performing during those years were *The Outlaws*, *Jianu’s Band*, *The Fall of Plevna* and other folk theatrical performances dealing with the life and deeds of outlaws. As we know, in communist ideology, the so-called outlaws were romanticized characters, fighters for social justice and against inequities during the early history of Romanian kingdoms. They fought against boyars and against the country’s mercantile leaders. Of course, things are rather nuanced there, as they were not always “brave fighters for people’s justice;” yet communist ideology transformed them into heroes whose main goal was establishing a more just social system. Since, in the communist narrative outlaws took money from the rich and gave it to the poor. For this reason, the first annual festivals from Iași region allowed performances of *The Outlaws* alongside folk dances and songs (Aurel Ardelean, 60 years old, Iași City, July 15, 2015, Interview).

Indeed, theatrical representations of *The Outlaws* were relevant for communist ideologues because they coincided with a Marxist societal vision. This mummings' folk theatrical performance embodies the class struggle in earlier stages of human society, and became an exemplification of it inside feudal societies throughout the Romanian territory. That is why folk plays with outlaws, together with folk dances and songs, were the first to be included in the annual folk festivals that started to spread across the country two years after Ceaușescu became Communist Party's supreme leader. They supported his strategy to create closer bonds with the masses and personalize his relation with people, thus leading his power towards neopatrimonialism. However, structures and institutions were needed for these mass spectacles; money had to be allocated and social networks created to implement these programs.

This was the perspective from above. From the perspective below this state structure, all this deployment of human forces and energies to perform for the country's supreme leader of the country, required qualified personnel who can mobilize and train people. Legitimate local leaders had to convince villagers to prepare for the performances; in addition to the onstage show, many rehearsals were required. Local people (who typically received no material compensation for performing) needed to be convinced to get involved in these activities. And for most of them, the joy of performing for the Communist Party's supreme leader was not strong motivation. When it came to power in November 1946, Communism had a little legitimacy among ordinary people, and this situation had not changed much in the intervening two decades (Deletant 1999). Thus, local organizers needed to use moral suasion to mobilize local villagers, commonly arguing that they would be promoting their village traditions and making them more widely known (*Strunga* 1993) (Appendix H).

There was also a continuous need for local cultural centres led by professional folklorists and managers who had to be permanently involved in organizing and training amateur teams of folk singers, dancers and theatre actors. These people had to know what kind of customs, songs and dances could and could not be presented onstage. Because of this, they had to be connected to the communist-nationalist ideology, with its principles and rules, little known by ordinary peasants who were not particularly attracted to "the wooden language" of official ideology and propaganda (Thom 2005). Although most of these professionals were volunteers, the new system needed some people to be permanently employed for such jobs. Heads of the counties' cultural centres had to have a holistic view of

the spectacle, as well as to be in touch with all the teams that were to appear onstage. Furthermore, they had to know in advance the repertoire of each team and the orders to follow when on stage. There were also logistical aspects, such as how to accommodate team members in high-school or college dorms, or in the culture centres. Once again, they had to be connected to the principals of these institutions to ensure that everything went well, since organizational mistakes observed by Ceaușescu or other members of its team could be followed by severe sanctions or at least complaints from the Party's upper level (Information acquired from an interview with Aurel Ardelean, 60 years old, Iași City, July 15, 2015).

These organizers were supposed to follow the rules imposed by the centre and they could be held liable for any failure in organizing spectacles. Yet many had little sympathy for the ideology of the Party or communist leaders' desire to control the masses and create a new mass identity for Romanians. Rather they developed a personal relation with rural folklore and genuine feelings for folk culture. They became attached to peasant culture and started to perceive their relation with rural folklore as a mission to promote it, to educate people about national values and to patrimonialize folk traditions that, they came to believe, could only come to be known to, and appreciated by city dwellers, via mass spectacles. They began to organize local folklore competitions in both cities and villages. The first such annual festival in Moldova started in 1966 in the *comună* of Strunga and was called *The Moldavian Rose*. The spectacles were soon successful and were sincerely enjoyed by local inhabitants, most of them city dwellers who would otherwise have had no direct contact with this dimension of village culture (Strunga Magazine 1993).

This is how the communist national ideology and Ceaușescu's predilection for mass spectacles, together with his neopatrimonial idea of having a personal relation with the masses, generated, during his early rule, a movement whose outcome was not necessarily attachment to the country's supreme leader, but rather the creation of a patrimonial consciousness<sup>49</sup> to many of the participants and local organizers (Rus and Neagota 2016). Besides creating the superordinate structures required for mass parades, this movement was responsible for the emergence of a genuine attachment to rural culture for many people who got closer to rural traditions due to these activities and performances. This rural culture however was passed through the thick filter of the Communist Party's ideology, a filter that

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<sup>49</sup>The ethnologist Bogdan Neagota defines patrimonial consciousness as a kind of attachment to authentic rural culture together with the awareness of the slow dissolution of this culture under the pressure of several processes such as industrialization, modernization of agriculture, urbanization, etc.



allowed the passage of elements considered suitable for its purposes and interests. Ordinary people, however, such as workers in the cities who had grown up in the countryside, typically sought the elements and representations with minimal ideological content, enjoying those parts of the spectacles that reminded them of the authentic rural culture they had known during childhood in the countryside. The folklore festivals, beside its political ideological purpose of controlling the masses, generated a patrimonial consciousness that was strongly related to the new realities of Communism such as industrialization, cooperativization of agriculture, urbanization, the massive migration waves from villages to cities – all of which were eroding the social fabric of the rural culture and its norms, customs and values.

From a holistic perspective, the cultural outcome resulting from implementing this kind of mass culture, had two faces just like god Janus. The most obvious face of the festivalization of peasant culture was a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1962) against the values of rural communities. In fact, these rural communities were like belts for the social transmission of some living cultural forms created as a result of peasants' interaction with their environment, economy and culture through the centuries. For this reason, the effect of symbolic violence on them was a process of reshaping the living rural cultural forms so that they corresponded to the requirements of the state – whose ultimate purpose was to control the masses, rather than to safeguard certain cultural forms threatened by the massive changes and challenges of modernization. As Bourdieu astutely observed in a different cultural and political context, but with similar effects on the peasantry:

Folklorization, which thrusts the peasantry into the museum and converts the last peasants into the guardians of a nature transformed into a landscape for city dwellers, is the necessary accompaniment of dispossession and expulsion. It is indeed the laws of differential profit, the fundamental form of the profit of distinction, that assign to the peasants their *reserves*, where they will be free to dance and sing their *bourrée* and *gavottes*, for the greater satisfaction of ethnologists and urban tourists, so long as their existence is economically and symbolically *profitable*... There is nothing new in the fact that the peasants, unceasingly confronted with the inseparably economic and symbolic domination of the urban bourgeoisie, have no choice but to play out, for city dwellers and also for themselves... (Bourdieu 2008:199).

The second face, less visible though, was the creation for many Romanians peasants uprooted by the industrialization of the country, of a real understanding of rural culture transformations

and challenges in relation with modernization. People who were in contact with these spectacles came to understand that living rural culture was gradually, yet inexorably vanishing and parts of it would only survive within these festivalized forms created by the Party. However many also understood that these festivals were created for purposes and objectives that had nothing to do with the culture from which these rural customs and living traditions had been forcefully extracted and exported to the cities.

#### **4. The second phase of the relation between Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial power and peasant folklore (July 1971 - October 1976)**

After July 1971, Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial power intensified its use of folklore as an ingredient in the symbolic-ideological mode of population control. This moment is important in Romanian communism because it marks a significant and visible change of the Party's politics and of its relation to culture production and cultural activities in the country. This new phase was officially introduced by Ceaușescu himself on July 6<sup>th</sup> in a discourse delivered in the front of the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. The official name of this speech was *Proposal of Measures for Improving the Political-Ideological Activities of Marxist-Leninist Education of Party Members and of all Workers (Propuneri de măsuri pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii)*, but is better known as the *July Theses*. The 6-page document contained 17 points and was written in the usual "wooden language" of Communist Party ideology (Thom 2005).

The document was full of repetitions, redundant expressions and empty words, but it introduced a new party agenda concerning culture as a general phenomenon disseminated through creations such as movies, literature, musical creations, religion, school education and party meetings. Its essence its main idea was quite simple. The Communist Party needed to become more visible in the cultural and artistic life of Romanians. Schools needed to be educating youth in the spirit of the Party's values. Censorship of religious life and promoting atheism had to become a priority, and censorship of capitalist movies and literature that promote a bourgeois lifestyle had to be strengthened. This last measure fit with the recommendation to impose autochthonous creations in the spirit of national and socialist values in all of these areas of life.

The document was extremely disheartening to writers, poets, singers and other artists (Breban 2005), signaling the end of a short period of relative liberalization and a return to a harsh period of wide-spread Stalinist censorship of individual professional creativity (Cătănuș 2005a). Vladimir Tismăneanu underscored the fact that Ceaușescu's Stalinist inclinations had been accentuated by his visit to China and North Korea in June 1971, where the personality cult of the leaders was expressed in huge mass spectacles (Tismaneanu 2003:206). Nevertheless, the exact reasons for the Romanian Communist Party's leader to launch this new system of tough measures and severe control of cultural life, remains a subject of debate to the present day (Cătănuș 2005b). Regardless, after July 1971, Ceaușescu was able to gather more authority and to firmly impose his neopatrimonial power as a form of governing. And, to do this, he used peasant folklore to benefit communist-nationalist ideology.

However, the word "folklore" is nowhere to be found in the *July Theses*, which is surprising since we know how important the field of cultural creation used to be in official discourses and party propaganda. One hypothesis is that folklore was already well subordinated to the Party directives and did not need supplementary coercive assessments. The *July Theses* mainly underlined the fields and activities that required intervention and remediation. Perhaps folklore was not explicitly named because this field was considered sufficiently controlled by Communist Party. However, the transformations taking place in Romania after July 1971, following the application of the *July Theses* directives, had clearly affected the official previous vision on folklore and folk production and its usage within the Communist Party ideology. There was not a radical transformation, as in other areas of cultural production, such as cinema, theatre, literature, and school education. It was more of a steady, yet decisive, integration of folklore into the ideology of the Romanian Communist Party, in which the transformation of folk creations into Communist-nationalist ideology accelerated because the institutions designed to collect peasant creations lost any kind of independence.

During this period, the activities of researchers in the fields of Ethnography and Folklore were redesigned. The Institute of Ethnography and Folklore was meant not only to preserve the archive materials collected from peasant communities, but also to promote the pragmatic political agenda of the Communist Party. After the *July Theses*, the main activities of state institutions, such as the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, according to Ion Vlăduțiu, the scientific manager of this institute, had

... been aimed at linking research to contemporaneity, at investigating not only the past, but also the present, in this way blending fundamental research in this field to practical, applied research. At present, surveys are made on contemporary folk creation, particularly on the use made of traditions in contemporary handicraft products and on the integration of traditional folk cultural elements with the socialist culture (Vlăduțiu 1971).

Vlăduțiu's article clarifies that, henceforth, folklore had to be used in the service of the Party, while heritagisation activities, such as creating folk material archives and editing systematic folklore volumes, had to „take a back seat.”

This makes it ironic to find the communist power openly militating for a folk art “uncontaminated” by any pollution that could transform it into kitsch. Indeed, an anonymous article from *Romania Journal*, called *The Offensive Against Folk Art Pollution*, asserted that in Romania folk creation and industrial activities peacefully coexisted: “[t]he Romanian spiritual scenery evidences a feature of international notoriety the existence of a vivid folk creativeness side by side with a modern industry and an industrializing agriculture...” (Romania, February 28, 1974:16).

This article goes on to explain the role of folklore in educating young people who “grew up with TV sets and tape-recorders” and could (probably) easily fall into the trap of a bourgeois lifestyle. In this respect, the role of folklore was pragmatic, in accordance with the *July Theses*' first-stated goal of educating the masses. The article describes the rich collection of the Folklore Institute that “accounts for a direct source of inspiration and guidance for the *Amateur Artist Movement*, encompassing thousands of groups in villages and towns, for the centers of folk art guidance and the specialized instructors throughout Romania's 39 counties.” This passage establishes the subordinate role of Folklore institutions and their archives to the *Amateur Artist Movement*, a movement that embodied the official vision of what folklore should be and how it needed to serve the Party's interests. In the second part of the article, readers could learn about “big popular festivals” organized across the country. The mass media was also to play an important role in this organization, acting as the Party's watchdog; the press needed to uncover the low-level artistic performances “that, mimicking folklore, turn it into operetta or revue-like shows” (Romania, February 28, 1974:17). The main concern appeared to be that folklore could fail to fulfill its primary role of properly

educating the masses, or even worse, it could mislead the people towards values that were not approved by the Party – such as the bourgeois ones:

The problem with the existence and proliferation of the various forms of kitsch is viewed and debated by cultural organizations with utmost responsibility, and the ample activity of multilaterally developing human personality and conscience to which the Romanian contemporary society attaches so great an importance, makes a point of fighting them. A genuine prophylactic drive has been triggered off against every form of esthetic pollution – distortion of folklore, production on an industrial scale and dissemination, particularly through tourist services, of tasteless adornment and decorative items which are alien to the century old artistry of the true folk artisans” (Romania, February 28, 1974:17).

Thus, the official position on folklore appears to be concerned not only with the relation between popular masses and folklore, but also with the way folklore was perceived and consumed by tourists. In this respect, the tourists, either Romanian or foreign, had to receive folklore education according to principles formulated by the Communist Party. As we learn in another issue of the *Romania Journal*, foreign tourists were encouraged to attend the *National Folklore Festivals*, as the one held on the *Black Sea* coast, where mummers’ teams like *Călușarii* who performed *Căluș* “the oldest Romanian dance, of Thracian origin” were always present (Romania, August 15, 1971). Groups like *Călușul* from Scornicești, the village where Ceaușescu had been born, were urged and supported to participate at international folklore festivals where they often got prizes. This was the case in 1975 when the band of *Călușari* from Scornicești got *Europa Folk Art* prize in Hamburg (Romania, October 31, 1975:14).

For foreigners and local tourists alike, the Communist Party generally promoted an idyllic view of the Romanian peasant and village. This perspective was presented in different journals embodying the official version of how tourism should relate to folklore. In 1972, the monthly magazine *Picturesque Romania* published in five languages (Romanian, English, French, German, Russian); it was designed in the spirit of the *July Theses* to both educate youth and promote Romania as an attractive tourist destination. In it, the ideas of “folklore”, “peasant” and “village” played once again a major role. The system of party propaganda emphasized the paradisiacal, archaic and mythical character of Romanian villages and

landscapes. An issue dated November 1973 contained an article signed by Simion Pop, the chief editor, who presented the Romanian village as an “unexplored touristic universe:”

A unique universe - purity, balance, environmental harmony, hospitality vocation, the open temperament of the peasant, a river flowing with specific originality (customs, mythology, ancient rituals), folk genius (folklore, arts, traditional crafts, costumes), a sea of sayings, songs, dances; in one word: the Romanian authentic-peasant. All these fascinate and enchant the guests that come from different locations on the globe. Countless testimonials attest that this is real. Here, this reality is just being reassessed from the tourist angle, emphasizing once more the inestimable wealth owned by the Romanian village. It is a really pure universe that is still authentic, still untouched! The tourist village is not an invention of someone. The touristic village (potentially) exists since the beginning of the world. Therefore, we do not make tourist villages, we preserve them, we protect them, we conserve those villages that exist from immemorial times, and we try to connect them with the thirst for purity and immaculate space of the modern man. We don't do anything else. The frequent recalls for redesigns and ‘reasonable accommodation’ must be tackled with lucidity and carefully evaluated so that they don't alter the charm, the authenticity and the rustic character specific to Romanian rural localities” (Pop 1973).

This article aligns with the Communist Party's new agenda for tourist villages. The Ministry of Tourism's order no.774 of June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1973, declared that eleven villages situated in all major regions of Romania - fully embodying the vision of authenticity and purity exposed by Simion Pop in his article - would become tourist villages. However, in the official vision promoted by the Party, the entire Romanian countryside was regarded as a Rousseauian ideal place where hospitality and kindness had not yet been destroyed by civilization.

In this Rousseauian view on the Romanian village, folk plays had their own role and status in promoting and supporting the nationalist-communist ideology. In the first 1976 issue of the *Picturesque Romania* magazine, several pages were dedicated to the traditional folk plays with masks. Even the issue's editorial, written by the chief editor Simion Pop, speaks about these traditions closely related to the Romanian people's past, but also with the directives of the Romanian Communist Party:

Tradition is the radiant train of continuity and fantasy drawn along by the people, its fabulous memory extending through centuries and events. To a great extent, that is how Romanians are grown out of a mixture where the hearth, the ethnic realm, the homeland's nature, ceremonial, expression of individuality, are conditions for creation and for destiny, our allies from the cradle to the grave... The wish our predecessors and forefathers used to make - "May you live long, may you blossom" - reveals its true dimensions today: a glorification of the human being, the undeniable god of the Carpathian-Danubian land. What they said acquires new meanings today when, through coextensive actions, we are building a new self-consciousness for the nation. The political revolutionary education does not exclude the ancient spiritual heritage, the permanence of the Romanian soul; on the contrary, it involves it. In building the socialist culture edifice that we are diligently working for, these icons of reason and sensibility, extensions of our own heritage tree, find their true place (S. Pop 1976).

Besides this revealing article that exposes clearly the relation between rural culture and the Communist Party's objectives, published in the "Eternul sufletului românesc"/eng. "The Permanence of the Romanian Soul" section of the magazine, there are five more articles with photos about the winter traditions of folk plays with masks (Appendix I). All these brief articles are accompanied by small maps of the locality in question, and practically cover all the large regions of the country: Moldova, Transylvania and Țara Românească/Wallachia. The articles present interesting data resulting from field observation in the five villages in question (Cucuteni, Iași County; Nereju, Vrancea County; Nădășel, Cluj County; Bragadiru, Teleorman County și Lelești, Gorj County). But everything is imprinted with a sense of the idyllic that introduces a hospitable and utterly kind Romanian peasant, whereas the folk plays with masks are marked by autochthony going back a long way to "the times of emperors Trajan and Decebal, if not even before them (Mihai Hetco, 1976:6)." The section opens with an article by Luminița Doja about the *Dance of the Deer* in Cucuteni *comună*, Iași County. This is also the least ideologized article, being no more than a description of a version of the *Dance of the Deer* in this Moldavian locality. However, the overall image created by these articles and especially by their relation with Simion Pop's editorial is that of a millenary continuity of the Romanian people in the geographical area between the Danube river and the Carpathian arc. This continuity is proved by the permanence of the folk plays with masks, and advances until the present day "within the edifice of the socialist culture".

Again, the official perspective on folklore, history and the pressing demand for mass education shaped the way the rural patrimony for tourism was built. It was yet another area in which the Communist Party felt the need to impose Nicolae Ceaușescu's autocratic vision. Paradoxically, despite the continuous political interference of the Communist Party in the field of folklore, the period following the *July Theses* opened the gate for a broader range of folk creations to be included in local and national folklore festivals. The folklore festivals of Iași County enriched substantially as more folk theater teams were allowed onstage:

After 1971, some other forms of folk theatre with masks were introduced in folklore festivals for the first time, besides the *Outlaws* plays. Teams from *comune* like Cucuteni and Strunga presented *The Dance of the Deer*, a very interesting and one of the oldest forms of folk theater. There were also teams like *The Bear*, *The Goat* and *The Rams*. For spectators, this was beneficial because, in previous years, people in the cities could not have the chance to watch these performances unless they went to a village during New Year's Eve. Folk plays started to have a big success and to be highly appreciated by spectators. As a result, they continued to be performed from that moment on, in all the editions of folk festivals held throughout Iași County (Aurel Ardelean, 60 years old, Iași City, July 15, 2015, Interview).

More than ever before, the danger of the folklorization of the entire culture seemed unavoidable. While some other fields of human cultural creation had been censored, the doors were opened for getting more diverse folklore representations and customs into the public arena. Professional folklorists saw this as an incredible opportunity, enabling them to patrimonialize and present folk creations that had not previously been allowed under Communism (*Strunga* 1993). While this was one of the few positive aspects stemming from the Communist Party's new cultural direction, there were negative consequences, as well. The interference of folklore in all fields of culture caused problems for professional singers, cinematographers, poets and artists who had to include folkloric themes in their creations if they were to be performed. Rock star and composer Nicu Covaci, the head of *Phoenix* rock band, recently discussed in an interview the censorship imposed on professional artists after July 1971, and how Ceaușescu's *July Theses* affected his musical creativity and style:

The Western influence lasted until Ceaușescu came back from North Korea in 1971, and issued those theses through which he ordered the promotion of national folklore in music, and in arts in general. We were blocked for a while. Our entire musical



repertoire had been influenced by great Western rock bands. Although we had played at the seaside every summer for at least a couple of months, after July 1971, we stopped being invited. So I and my friend Ioji Kappl locked ourselves inside the house for about three months to find a solution to this problem. Luckily, we found among the discs produced by Electrecord some with pre-Christian music, traditions and rituals from Romania and the Balkans. Inspired by them, we started to sing. This is how we produced the album “Those who gave us a name” and managed to find a new musical path. We created a new genre: ethno-rock. In this context, the authorities could no longer censor us, and they started to let us give concerts again. A year later, we produced another new album “Flute’s Bud”, a more mature and elaborate piece. Finally, we produced one more album “Musical Fables”. What else should I say, we went nuts! (Gorgonaru 2014).

Subsequently, Covaci’s ethno-rock melodies were used as soundtrack for Romanian movies that enjoyed substantial success in the early 1970s. One of the most notorious examples is that of Sergiu Nicolaescu’s 1974 film *The Immortals*. Made according to the directives of the *July Theses*, the movie glorified the great deeds of Romanian ancestors fighting next to Mihai Viteazu, the Walachian king who had been able to achieve, in 1600, the first unification of three provinces (Walachia, Moldova and Transylvania) included in modern-day Romania. In the movie, peasants were presented as a progressive force fighting against foreign occupation and dispossession of Romanian territories and wealth, while Mihai Viteazu’s ex-soldiers were portrayed as heroes of the country’s immemorial past, ready to die for unification.

Folk motifs and romanticized historical themes started to appear in most patriotic movies produced immediately after the *July Theses*. A classic example is the 1976 movie, directed by Mircea Moldovan, *Pintea*. Pintea was a Romanian outlaw who fought against social inequalities and injustices and organized one of the biggest revolts against the Austrian occupation. The movie, based on the life of a real character who lived at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, used folk themes heavily, as well as songs and ballads meant to reconstruct Pintea’s figure and life. Authentic folk songs orally transmitted and collected from peasants in the region where Pintea lived and died, were used in the movie and became the most important part of its soundtrack. Besides this, a band of folk play – *The Goat team*, appears in a movie scene going from house to house, playing their sketches in the yards of the householders. Pintea himself takes advantage of a New Year’s Eve custom – *the mummies’ house visit*, wearing a mask to escape the vigilance of the imperial guards, who sought to arrest him, but

caught another mummer instead. Such scenes were used to demonstrate the ancient character of some rituals like mummers' plays. Folk motifs were often used as testimonials of the Romanian continuity and autochthony on the current territory of contemporary Romania.

These are just few example of what the folklorization of culture meant after the *July Theses*. Through these kinds of cultural creations, Romania's Communist leadership aimed to create deep patriotic feelings among Romanians, and adherence to the Party's agenda. Although the people did come to feel patriotic love for the country, the Party's second purpose was not achieved, in that people did not become strongly attached to the values of Communism. At this point I align my views with Verdery's (1991) that, out of the twofold communist-nationalist doctrine, only the second component – the nationalistic one – was successful with the masses, while the first – the communist one – achieved much less traction with ordinary people.

Moreover, in spite of a hegemonic process of culture folklorization, certain cultural productions did not become the dull, dry creations that one might expect. Despite the rigid and harsh directives imposed by the *July Theses*, genuine human creativity has not been completely crushed. There were artists who were able to produce works of beauty, as exemplified by the Phoenix rock band and the movies just discussed. Similarly, inside the *Amateur Artist Movement*, especially at the local level, besides ideological demands imposed by the Party's agenda, folklore lovers were able to embed feelings of attachment and respect for peasant culture in people.

All in all, this blend of competing tendencies and trends resulted in a heavily folklorized culture gravitating around the festivalisation of folk creations. This cultural *mélange* following *July Theses* set the direction of evolution for patrimonialization of folk creations even long after the collapse of Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial regime.

##### **5. The third phase of the relation between Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial regime and peasant folklore (October 1976 – December 1989)**

In July 1971, power had already been completely monopolized by Nicolae Ceaușescu. His clan and close friends controlled important sectors such as politics, finance, culture and mass media. The only missing element was a much closer relation between the supreme leader and the masses. In Ceaușescu's vision, not only did the masses need to be subordinate to the leader, they also need to express admiration for him. It seems that Ceaușescu felt the

need for this missing element. After the Stalinization of culture following the *July Theses*, the invention of a mass-festival in the spirit of Chinese Cultural Revolution as an expression of piety toward the supreme leader was somehow predictable.

Ceaușescu's speech at the eleventh congress of the Romanian Communist Party, held during November 24<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 1974, has come to be seen as the direct source of the *Song to Romania* festival, a mass celebration that "outpaced every other artistic structure created previously by the regime (Oancea 2007:43).

Apparently due to Ceaușescu's unpredictability in exercising power, the mass media, now totally subordinate to him, introduced this mass event only shortly before it started; the first mention of the *Song to Romania* festival of which we are aware being in *Scânteia*, the official daily newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party, on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1976" (Oancea 2007:43). Less than three weeks later, the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1976 issue of *Romania Journal*, described and explained the festival to foreign readers:

Contributed by all ministries and political and public organizations involved in the wide-ranging political and educational process in Romania, the festival is intended to stimulate the creation of all genres, deriving inspiration from the realities of socialist construction and the Romanian people's past alike. At the same time, the festival will encompass all artistic domains and all categories of creators and performers, and that will enable a harmonious intertwining of professional art with mass creation, a fruitful exchange of experience in either sense (Romania, November 1976:9).

Although the festival was advertised as a cooperation between professional and amateur artists, *Song to Romania* was, in fact, designed as an assault against professional creations that still remained independent up to that moment (Petrescu 1998:241).

Just days before *Song to Romania*'s first performance, daily newspapers and other journals throughout the country started to publish multiple articles, describing its rules and regulations. Even journals with totally different profiles, such as *The Picturesque Romania*, began to fill with articles about this mass national festival. Apparently, *Song to Romania* somehow encapsulated all existing cultural forms in the country.

These publications all reinforced the idea that *Song to Romania* was a celebration of three key moments in Romania's history: "100 years since Romania's independence", "75 years since the greatest peasant uprising against oppressors", "55 years since the creation of

the Youth Communists Union”. The festival was also connected to the rich history of the revolutionary masses’ rebellions against exploiters:

More than a century ago, a few years after the 1848 revolution and, then again, on the eve of the Union of the Principalities, in a crucial epoch for the destiny of the Romanian people, a great visionary poem was brought out: *Song to Romania*. Its authorship is still discussed – some literary historians considering writer and essay Alecu Russo to be the author, others suggesting the great revolutionary and historian Nicolae Bălcescu, but the poem remains among the moving lyrical transfigurations known by the dramatic epopee of our people, a matchless hymn to the homeland, to its past and future. Praising the virtues of the forefathers, calling to struggle for the accomplishment of the lofty ideas of liberty, justice and equality on the land of ancient Dacia, the poet visualized, in the end, the happiness of the people through the attainment of its political ideals: national unity and independence. Symbolically, the *Song to Romania Festival* takes place under this uplifting emblem (Romania, January 1977:20).

The media blitz revealed that the festival would follow five stages. The mass-stage (from October 1976 through February 1977, the county stage (in March and April), the inter-county (in May 1977), the national stage (starting in late May), with awards ceremonies for professional and amateur artists at the beginning of June 1977 (Petrescu 1988:244).

I have discussed the danger represented by the folklorization of culture occurring immediately after the 1971 *July Theses*. Now, with the release of the *Song to Romania* festival, this “danger” disappeared. Folklore became absorbed into this cultural soup called *Song to Romania*, becoming just one piece of a behemoth cultural form that, like a giant amoeba, swallowed everything around it. Of course, the *Amateur Artist Movement* played an important role in the logistics and organization of this festival. Nevertheless, even this movement had already lost its rural-folkloric essence, having become a platform for a rich diversity of bands from both rural and urban areas that were asked to perform for the *Song to Romania* festival.

Petrescu called this event “a pitiful national artistic hotchpotch” (Petrescu 1988:250), because artistic bands that had nothing to do with each other played and competed on the same stage. Thousands of teams from villages, factories, local and national culture houses and professional theaters competed. The first round of elimination was at local level, then

larger county festivals; finally, some teams competed nationally. The first national festival competition was said to have involved over two million participants and encompassed a huge diversity of teams: professional ballerinas from the National Opera; *Călușari* mummers from Olt, Argeș and Teleorman counties; folk dancers from Flămânzi village; professional established singers; schoolchildren; soldiers; students from military schools; poetry reciters; and opera singers (Betea, Mihai, and Țiu 2014:60).

A key feature of the festival was the relation between the masses and the leader; Ceaușescu couple carefully watched the festival developing. As the final winner's parade ended, Ceaușescu and his wife stepped onstage to dance a traditional folk dance – the *hora* – together with artists from the Southern part of the country where both of them had been born and raised (Oancea 2007:54). Besides creating this personal relation with the masses, the festival *Song to Romania* included many poems and songs that glorified the person, work and accomplishments of the country's supreme leader. The festival aimed at fulfilling two main purposes: creating political legitimacy for the supreme leader and exerting rigorous mass control (Idem 2007:9). However, ordinary people grew sick of these parades and typically would not watch the broadcasts of the festival on National Television (Rus 2006). As some anthropologists observed, “the central apparatus was more interested in arousing public awe than in building public legitimacy” (Verdery 1991:85). The National Festival Song to Romania “provides one of the best examples of symbolic political manipulation in the cultural arena...” where “symbols are used by the regime to support an institutionalized ‘lie’ and gloss over the deep contradictions in society”, stated Anca Giurchescu in what may be the only scientific article published by an insider on this subject during the Ceaușescu dictatorship (Giurchescu 1987:164).

*Song to Romania* festival provides strong evidence that the Ceaușescu regime became a form of neopatrimonial domination, similar to regimes in some African countries whose political realities and leadership have been described as *neopatrimonialist* (Erdmann and Engel 2007).

In Ceaușescu's regime, folklore was used until the end as an instrument of propaganda and a bulwark of the communist-nationalist ideology that mediated relations between the leader and the masses. In this context, folk plays like the *Dance of the Deer*, *Dance of the Goat*, *Small Horses*, *Malanca* and others in this category continued to play an important part in the ideological construction of Ceaușescu's nationalist-communism. A few months after

the launch of the *Song to Romania* festival, the *Picturesque Romania* magazine praised the event. In the meantime, it went on to underline the close relationship between the Communist Party's ideology and rural traditions. Consequently, the first 1977 issue of the magazine displayed right on its front cover a photo of the deer mask of the *Dance of the Deer* ritual as it still was in Moldavian villages (Appendix J). This issue of the *Picturesque Romania* magazine dedicated several pages to winter folk plays with masks. They introduced again case studies from various villages in Romania where rituals such as the *Dance of the Goat*, *Stephan the Great's Malanca* and *Dance of the Monkeys* were performed. Photos of the *Dance of the Small Horses*, *Dance of the Bears*, masks and mummers' teams in various villages were also included (Appendix K). The first 1978 issue of the same magazine dedicated more pages to mummers' plays, with a whole page presenting the *Dance of the Deer* ritual in Cotnari village, Iași county, and accompanied by more relevant pictures of the *Deer* team members. The description of certain winter rituals belonging to the folk theater with masks category covers almost a third of this issue's contents. Within its *The Permanence of the Romanian Soul* and *Datina și Dorul/Tradition and Longing* sections, the January issue of the *Picturesque Romania* magazine generally included articles that referred to folk plays from various areas of Romania.

The propensity of nationalist-communism towards these customs is easy to understand. Folk plays with masks were classified by Romanian folkloristics as secular carols. Influenced by the Marxist slogan "Religion is the opium of the people" (Marx 1844), the communist doctrine tried to suppress those folk expressions that had a mystical-religious background, and were related to Christian subjects such as the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the three Magi to confirm that Jesus had been brought to the world, the relation between the individual and the divine, etc. But the folk plays had nothing to do with any of these ideas. Moreover, the fascinating masks and costumes worn by the performers made people think of an archaic world, and could be used by the nationalist-communist ideology to justify the millenary autochthony of Romanians throughout a specific geographic territory.

Reaching this point, this paper's readers might say: "Well, yes, finally, after centuries of ecclesiastic interdictions, mummers' plays could finally correspond to the ideology of a superordinate political entity - the Romanian communist state!". Yet, contrary to what one could imagine, this ideational match between mummers' plays and the nationalist-communist ideology with an atheist vein was neither the equivalent of a just appreciation of these valuable customs, nor that of a well-conceived and rigorously applied patrimonialization. On

the contrary, mummers' plays had to serve the communist leaders in obtaining political legitimacy, and the Communist Party ideology in pervading the masses. In fact, Folklore was one of the national symbols that could be understood by the large mass of Romanian peasants or even by the recently proletarianized peasantry who represented a large part of the country's population; therefore, communist ideologues agreed upon it so frequently.

Indeed, "of all the symbols of political "legitimation", national symbols and especially folklore have achieved a large degree of acceptance among the population", stated the folklorist Anca Giurchescu, already in 1987 (Giurchescu 1987:168). This insight was sharpened by Claudiu Oancea twenty years later:

Folklore was the other main tool that the regime sought to use and modify in order to achieve its goals. Folklore was perceived as being central to Romanian cultural identity and, thus, it constituted a perfect means of gaining legitimacy. *Song to Romania* was supposed to discover, maintain and provide a framework for the evolution of folklore. Folklore was associated with national identity, at a mass level, expressed in artistic forms. It could be changed in order to disseminate symbols of national ideology, such as the cultural unity of the Romanian people, as well as ideas of present-day prosperity and belief in socialist progress (Oancea 2007:49).

From this perspective, patrimonialization of folk traditions meant a continuous exercise of creation and recreation of a hegemonic cultural form that seized big chunks of the public space and transformed them in a field where Communist Party ideology and the supreme leader's ideas about culture were unfolding. Nonetheless, *Song to Romania* neither created real legitimacy for the Party's leader, nor made him popular among ordinary people including participants.

One possible explanation, is that as this festival was conceived and designed, it required changes in the form of many rural customs. Rural traditions often had to be redesigned to be presented onstage. In my interviews with peasants who took part in this festival, I learned how the Party's directives heavily challenged their creativity and their relationship to local customs and rituals, including the mummers' plays.

Bogdan Doinel, a 48-year old man from Sarmizegetuza, Hunedoara County, recounted how his village school was ordered by the County's authorities to create a team to participate in the *Song to Romania* festival drawing on the folk drama called *The Dance of*

*the Deer*. He and his team passed the early levels of this competition and qualified for national competition in Bucharest. But they had to completely change the structure of their local custom to fit the rules of the last stage of the competition and be appreciated by the Communist Party's top leaders, including Ceaușescu. First, the elders who were traditionally the team's flute players had to be removed, as theirs was a schoolchildren's team. Since the masked deer character needed music to dance to, they recruited some high-school students from a music school in a northern city of the county. Unfortunately, although they knew how to play more sophisticated instruments, these students had not studied the flute. So, some were asked to play their *tárogatós* to accompany the deer; my interviewee – the deer dancer – Mr. Bogdan Doinel had just one day to learn to dance to the rhythms of *tárogatós*. And this is how their new team performed in front of Ceaușescu and his wife (Bogdan Doinel, 48 years old, Sarmizegetuza village, January 13, 2015, Interview). But the most interesting aspect of this event was its influence on village traditions. Since then, *The Deer team* traveling through that village and the neighbouring areas of Sarmizegetuza village at Christmastime is accompanied by *tárogatós* – a new tradition dating back to the 1980s, that remains in place today.

If this is how the perspective from above shaped local living folk traditions, we should also consider the perspective from below regarding the diversity of motivations that led people to participate in these competitions. An elder flute player from Cucuteni, Iași County, who I interviewed, told me that he participated in the deer team at the festival *Song to Romania* because he wanted to make the tradition of his own village known beyond its borders. Bogdan Doinel from Sarmizegetuza village, Hunedoara county, stated that he was too young – only fourteen – to take a decision by himself; he participated because he was asked to do so by his teachers and by the school principal. Some other villagers mentioned their love for traditions such as folk dances and songs that had nothing to do with Ceaușescu and his cult. Anca Giurghescu, an experienced field researcher and ethnochoreologist observed, at the scene, already in 1987, how the symbols used by party ideologues failed to fulfill their main aims and to hit their targets. This was because “people explain these particular symbols according to their personal desires and feelings. In contradiction to the official intentions they may, for example, substitute nationalism with local patriotism, small group solidarity and identification with an ethnic group, along with esthetic pleasure, entertainment and catharsis” (Giurghescu 1987:169).



Claudiu Oancea conducted interviews with several participants and found similar sentiments; indeed, most former participants reduced the festival to their own experience. He also demonstrated how the new narratives, following the 1989 anti-Communist Revolution, shaped their vision and their understanding of the festival (Oancea 2007).

Thus, looking from above at the Ceaușescu regime, and with current knowledge, at the regime's last fourteen years, we see a landscape dominated by *Song to Romania*, a behemoth national festival, a grotesque form of invented tradition (E. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992) and an insidious patrimonialization. We also see an authoritarian leader striving for a hegemonic national culture, a creation of his mind based on communist-nationalist ideology. And we see his seemingly insatiable desire to arouse public awe and to create mass-identities in the spirit of nationalist-communist ideology (Verdery 1991:85).

On the other hand, it is legitimate to ask, what was the practical effect of Ceaușescu's vision on folklore on the Romanian postsocialist state patrimonialization policies? From this perspective, although the *Song to Romania* festival ended with the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989, its onstage patrimonialization of rural culture has enduring effects (*Strunga* 1993). Much of the symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:166) against living folklore (Giurchescu 1987:169) that took such extreme forms in the last fourteen years of Communist dictatorship has been perpetuated through postsocialist state heritagisation policies even after December 1989. In this respect Bendix's observation regarding patrimonialization fits well with the Romanian case: "Heritagisation itself has tradition. Organizations and institutions have been created to legitimize [heritagisation as a cultural practice] and to contribute to turning ever more diversified notions of heritage into a self-understood, habitual aspect of culture" (Bendix 2009:254).

## **E. Conclusions**

The instrumentation of folklore for political interests was a constant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as various states with very different political orientations used it to forge a symbolic image of their own nation (Dorson 1966). Such state involvement in the cultural life of small-scale communities is not new. Throughout history, dictatorial regimes have appropriated (or banned) cultural forms that promote human freedom and the human capacity for self-expression through aesthetic creations that embody complex relationships between individuals and their communities. Indeed, cultural appropriation of community culture is actually deeply rooted in the history of mankind, from the time of the earliest states. In a

comparative study, archaeologist David Wengrow (2001) shows how the aesthetic labor involved in pottery production in the Near East evolved from sophisticated and aesthetically extremely complex forms in late Neolithic societies of Mesopotamia to more simplified forms, placed under the authority of state institutions and of an elite charged with their production, simultaneous to the emergence of the region's first states. Further, Wengrow shows "how the transition from simple to complex society involved the dislocation of aesthetic labor from everyday practices, and its transposition to a restricted, and politically empowered, sector of society" (2001:168). This English archaeologist proves that the aesthetic labor of communities previous to state formation was closely tied to their moral value systems, encompassing "the fabric of the everyday life". That is, the transformation of these activities in a series of community daily practices toward the sectors controlled by the elites also ended a community way of life based on creativity free of political constraints and the expression of a complex array of human feelings.

We can observe the same type of control, together with the dislocation of rural customary communities when the Romanian national state was formed, and particularly during Ceaușescu's dictatorship, when even community aesthetic intangible creations such as mummers' play and other folk productions were used to construct symbolic capital for a type of neopatrimonial domination. Anca Giurchescu draws a crucial distinction between folklore and folklorism, with living folklore being a creation of social groups in their social and cultural environment, while folklorism is an expression of the transformation of local folk creations by a central power that manipulates and re-shapes those symbols produced by rural communities that have a "psychological and expressive appeal" [for large parts of the country population], which lies primarily in their esthetic and moral qualities". "They [the Romanian political elites] replaced living folklore with "folklorism". In the process of re-evaluation of the cultural heritage, the State drawn only upon the 'progressive' and 'pure' elements of folklore. Only the most complete and impressive variants were selected, in order to produce 'beautiful', 'representative', 'authentic' examples" (Giurchescu 1987:169).

Among Romanian leaders, Ceaușescu showed the highest interest in folklore. He appropriated it from peasants who created it in their small rural communities, and transposed it onstage. Through great national festivals such as *Song to Romania*, he turned folklore into a fundamental tool for the ideological construction of the relationship between the Romanian state's leader and the masses. Once again, mummers' plays suffered under the harshness of

time, forced to serve the ideological objectives of a totalitarian state rather than to benefit from a safeguarding model revolving around the community and its needs. Unfortunately, the ideological model of "safeguarding" rural communities' traditions by means of folk festivals continued even in postsocialist times. It turned into the main pattern of promoting them, based rather on a form of symbolic violence than on a relationship where the rural community consisting of its practitioners and active spectators could be in the foreground.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM COMMUNITY RITUALS TO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

#### A. Global Depeasantization and Its Effect on Peasant Mummings' Plays

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was almost over when Eric Hobsbawm launched his spectacular thesis on the death of the peasantry: "The most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this [twentieth] century, and the one which cuts us off forever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry" (Hobsbawm 1996:289). This appalling thesis, based on a series of statistic data, archive sources and on the analysis of an impressive number of works, seemed to be an inexorable verdict. While Hobsbawm regarded the death of the peasantry as an obvious phenomenon, a series of scholars re-questioned the thesis of peasantry disappearance, analyzing it thoroughly and from multiple angles.

One of the authors who were most rigorous in dealing with this issue was Farshad A. Araghi (Araghi 1995). In his work "Global Depeasantization, 1945-1990", Araghi claims that there are two related processes: *deruralization*, caused by the depopulation of rural areas, and *overurbanization*, marked by the accelerating development of the population in large urban centers, especially given the wave of immigrants coming from rural areas. After observing these current realities, Araghi analyzes deeply concerning the disappearance of the peasantry. Thus, in his opinion, this thesis is inextricably linked to the discussions around the concept of modernity; these discussions go far back in time to Marx, Engels, Lenin, but also to a late 19th century generation of thinkers of Marxist descent including Kautsky and Chayanov. For all of them, peasantry seemed an anachronism, a class that should necessarily be eliminated with the expansion of capitalist production relations into the rural world or through the transformation of peasants into proletarians that would be the basis of the class struggle between proletarians and capital owners.

On the other hand, Araghi shows us, there is also a thesis on the persistence of peasantry. The authors promoting this last one argue that, because of various reasons, peasants are not subjected to the logic of industrial capitalism precisely because their societies have their own pace of development and this does not go along with the quick changes produced following the Industrial Revolution. In most cases, the followers of the thesis on the persistence provide the example of South America where the number of the ones living in rural areas is increasing directly proportional to the population in the area; thus, it

does not change as absolute number, but only as percentage when compared to the urban population. By the end of his article, Araghi identifies two stages of the depeasantization process: 1) from 1945 to 1973 (at a slower pace, even coexisting with areas where a peasantization process was taking place); 2) from 1973 to 1990 (when the pace of depeasantization was accelerated especially because of the major transformations of world economy after 1990). "Against the expectations of the proponents of the persistence thesis, therefore, depeasantization has been a major global process of our time" (Araghi 1995:359), Araghi states at the end of his article.

Recent studies in political economy, such as the work edited by A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009), try to approach the issue of the peasantry's destiny from a double perspective: from the perspective of the current globalization process and from the historical perspective of the agrarian question coined by Kautsky (1899). Analyzing the agrarian question layer by layer, the two authors and all the other researchers contributing to the mentioned volume, show that there are multiple standpoints from where the question may be tackled: that of the peasants' dependence on dominating classes and entities, and that of the conflict with these entities; that of the peasants' relation with labor in the era of globalization; that of the change in gender relations among peasants as result of the seasonal migration to foreign countries, etc. Despite this extremely complex picture, there is a recurring element in all these dimensions and processes: during the last two decades, capitalism has undergone a series of major transformations, including the consolidation of entities such as "a new global corporate agri-food regime" that has had profound implications on the small agricultural producer. Altogether, this has led to a growing dependence of peasants on market economy, finally causing a wave of massive migrations from the village to the city. In the meantime, however, peasants have also adapted to these new realities, being integrated juridically and especially economically in the global market and in transnational firms. In addition to all this, there are changes in the peasants' identity and a "new peasant" is also emerging (Watts 2009).

*The New Peasantries* is also the title of a recent and substantial work written by Van Der Ploeg. Contrary to the authors mentioned in the lines above, Ploeg speaks about a new process - the repeasantization. His main argument is that, given the growth of the global population, the absolute number of peasants is also growing, representing today two fifths of the world's population. This absolute number of agriculturists is the biggest so far in the history of mankind, although the proportion between urban and rural populations has inclined

the percentage balance towards the urban one, increasingly numerous during the last decades. Despite their omnipresence, peasants were shaded by a process called "manufactured invisibility". Behind the misty curtain hampering a clear vision, there is an arena where the real fight actually takes place. It is the fight between the *Empire* and the peasantry, a fight where the two entities "engage in multilayered and multidimensional contradictions and clashes (Ploeg 2009)." By giving it the name *Empire*, Ploeg identifies it as "a new and powerful mode of production" that includes several features like expansionism, hierarchical control and the creation of a new, material and symbolic order. Global food empires, agribusiness groups, large retailers, state apparatuses, scientific models and technologies are the components of the transnational reality called *Empire*. This tentacular entity, spread over the whole planet, is responsible for creating the disjunction between the agricultural production and local ecosystems, for the disintegration of the close relation between the rural worker and the land he/she labored, for creating a brutal division of work, as well as of the time and space given to work, for the unprecedented space and time distance drawn between production and consumption, for setting an enormous distance between the farming and the regional society. All these processes finally lead to the creation of an artificial industrial space where food is produced by means of genetic engineering, using artificial growth factors against nature, marginalizing nature, eventually eliminating it completely and replacing it with an artificial surrogate. Meant to counter-balance this global reality, re-peasantization is in fact "the fight for autonomy and survival in a context of deprivation and dependency" (Ploeg 2009:7) during an era of *Empire* and *Globalization*.

Over time, other researchers have produced theses similar to that of Ploeg. While studying the process of agricultural land retrocession to the initial owners, right after the December 1989 Romanian Revolution, A.L. Cartwright, for instance, spoke about the *Return of the Peasant* in the years following the fall of communism (Cartwright 2001). Despite the fact that it is contextual and strictly limited to the first decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain, his assertion is obviously valid and valuable. In those years, given the collapse of the giant, energy-consuming and economically inefficient factories, many of the industrial workers from Romanian cities approached the chance to go back to the countryside and work the land as a compromise solution to the economic crisis and social unrest (Rus 2003).

Regarded in their entirety, the two theses - the depeasantization and the re-peasantization - seem to be completely opposite to one another. Nevertheless, they intersect in at least one point. Their defenders speak about the incredible adapting capacity of peasants

and about their ability to bounce between the small-scale subsistence agricultural production and the seasonal or permanent work for earning money. Only some of the household members get involved in this type of work, and the work is usually carried in large urban centers of countries well-developed economically. Ploeg mentions his interviewees - peasants of Catacaos - who had been involved, for more than 20-30 years, in a multitude of activities, some with even 3-4 jobs in the meantime. This phenomenon takes place while the other family members work their agricultural land trying to reduce the cost of subsistence agricultural work to a minimum (Ploeg 2009:66).

Adept of the Marxist idea that nowadays peasants represent an anachronism, Michael Kearney advances a well-articulated perspective that explains plainly the new status of peasantry within global economy. Referring to the multitude of money-making methods in global economy - from a job inside a firm to street vending, washing windshields of cars stopped at intersections, hauling, prostitution and sale of narcotics - he notices that many of these activities may even be considered criminal by the state and by public institutions, but they are revealing for the creation of a new identity in the global economy landscape - one that he tries to circumscribe by the concept of *polybian identities*. There are even polybious families, too. Kearney tells us these are families that share their members between agricultural labor and the activities meant to produce money, and that can no longer be defined by means of rigid concepts such as "peasantry" and "working class" (Kearney 1996:146-147).

Deborah Bryceson, one of the editors of *Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij 2000), analyzes in detail the two theses - depeasantization and re-peasantization - in the context of the Neo-liberal Era, and offers us the complex picture of peasantry nowadays (Bryceson 2000a). Just as Ploeg, A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay, she speaks about the situation of peasants faced with the ever increasing "large-scale industry" and about the peasants' strategies within this new landscape. "Agro-industrial corporations' enormous economies of scale, high levels of capitalization, and advanced technology are antithetical to the relatively low-yielding, labour-intensive nature of peasant family farming (Idem 2000:309)." Yet, this situation does not necessarily lead to the elimination of peasantry; it rather makes peasants adapt to the new global conditions. One would expect that, as a result of these new conditions, agricultural labor would be abandoned. On the contrary, what happens seems to surprise even the global designers of the Neo-liberal Era.

Peasants' subsistence production, often considered the hallmark of backwardness by critics, is in fact their major trump card. The fear of 'retreat into subsistence production' was the bane of many colonial officers who viewed it as the peasants' bolt-hole to escape market fluctuations and government demands. How often peasants' 'just walk away' response actually cropped up in past negotiations with their colonial overlords is highly debatable... The utility of subsistence production for peasants now lies in accommodating to, rather than escaping from the market. In periods of market decline or strong price fluctuations, subsistence production has an essential cushioning function, safeguarding peasant survival in the face of adversity (Ibidem 2000:312).

As one may observe, the alternatives regarding the future of peasantry do not seem too optimistic in either of the possibilities mentioned above. The picture of the unfolding of peasantry under the auspices of global capitalism offers only few alternatives: peasantry may disappear; it may transform, becoming something different of what it used to be; it may continue to exist under the shape of "a new peasantry" at the cost of a fight - carried with uneven forces - against the strong economic and political actors (what Ploeg called *The Empire*). In this chapter, my hypothesis is that the analysis of the decline of the peasantry's system of values during the last two decades - the mummies' plays being included herein - may provide a series of conclusive answers to the questions and dilemmas raised by the authors analyzed above. The main questions I shall try to answer in this chapter are: What will happen to the peasants' system of values within this new landscape dominated by neo-liberalism and global capitalism? What will happen to mummies' plays within this new landscape dominated by market economy and global capitalism?

## **B. International Labor Migration, Peasant System of Values and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Postsocialist Rural Romania**

### **1. Peasant System of Values Falls Apart**

Robert Redfield was one of the first authors who understood that peasant societies cannot be studied and understood as isolated cultures due to their strong connections to the urban world, especially through the relations between peasants and their superordinate classes. Commerce, conflicts with superordinate classes and migrations must all be included inside this complex picture. Nevertheless, despite the large peasant population on the planet and of its incredible cultural diversity, there is a "scheme of values" (Redfield 1969:70) that



remains mostly unchanged in all peasant societies mostly as a result of peasants' existence in small communities that revolve around land labor and livelihood inside their village borders. Within this "scheme of values", there are several elements that could be found in most peasant societies: "an intense attachment to native soil; a reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways; a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community; a certain suspiciousness, mixed with appreciation, of town life; a sober and earthy ethic" (Idem 1969:78). This value-orientation makes peasants adopt principles that could explain the persistence of this human type over time and of its attachment to a particular type of existence. Despite these tendencies, Redfield observes, in parallel to the increasing closeness between the urban and the rural worlds, peasants develop certain aspirations and "now want to be something other than peasants" (Ibidem 1969:77).

The process of erosion of values within peasant communities - a tendency already very visible in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Redfield wrote his most important works on peasants - started to increase especially by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turning into a real wave in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. What I called "the system of rural values" in the third chapter of this work, describing it as "the last bastion of peasants against mainstream society", starts to disintegrate gradually as a result of the simultaneous action of several factors. Certain anthropologists conducting field research in the Eastern European area have well understood all these, and observed the special opportunity to capture this particular process within this still strongly ruralized region. Romania especially has turned into a fertile analysis field for the dissipation of peasant values in front of the changes brought along by modernity.

In her work *The Vanishing Hectare, Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*, Katherine Verdery described the process that, during the first decade after the fall of Communism in Romania, turned land from a source of prestige, status and dignity into a negative asset. First of all, revenues from working the land in small agricultural households became derisive, especially when compared to the significant volume of work invested in it. Thus, the economic value of the small land lots given back to peasants by the Law 18 of February 1991 decreased enormously. This happened especially because of the principles of market economy according to which big economic actors could afford working the agricultural land with a modern and efficient technology, obtaining large profits by commercializing agricultural products at a lower price than that offered by small agricultural producers. With a very dramatic decrease of the economic value of the land labored within the small-scale subsistence farm, its cultural value began to reflect this change, too.

Accordingly, just one decade after the December 1989 Revolution, Verdery's interviewees declared that they worked the land only "[f]rom shame before other people" (Verdery 2003).

Under these new economic circumstances, many of the young people living in rural areas decided to emigrate or to retail in neighboring countries like Hungary and Turkey. Other villagers tried to open small village shops or to invest in those crops that would bring more money to the household when brought to the free market. This way, by the early 2000, small peasant households became mostly decrepit, while peasant values were increasingly undermined by a series of processes such as: *demodernization, deracination, delegitimation, devaluation, polarization, new subjectification*. Eventually, all these represent an unfolding of actions and circumstances that eroded village communities, and this erosion became visible in the transformation of values in the village world. In fact, in Verdery's perspective, the death of peasantry does not represent the vanishing hectare as physical entity, "but as a set of values surrounding it" (Idem 2003:191).

From a similar perspective, Katy Fox (Fox 2011) speaks about the "reconfiguration of values" in the Romanian rural world brought along by the expansion of the economic rationality in all the spheres of rural existence. In Fox's opinion, the perpetual devaluation of peasants is a process directly linked to a series of realities becoming more visible specially after Romania's join of the European Union and the legislation it promoted. We are talking about privatization, marketization and globalization. All of these follow the logic of profit and efficiency, excluding the individual and his/her values from the center of its preoccupations. However, value, personhood and hope are those that should create the fundament of the human being in relation to the surrounding social, cultural and economic environment. Consequently, value is produced in daily activities by means of actions such as: the labor for supporting a household, the production of life means, human interaction within family and community, rest, prayer, food production and consumption. Circumscribing as such, Fox connects value to the personhood's intrinsic essence - inextricably linked to family, politics, religion and not necessarily to market economy, the changes within it and the gain of money capital. Next to value, personhood and hope have their own place in the constellation creating a certain idea of the individual - *the peasant* - closely linked to his/her cultural, social and economic environment.

Nevertheless, the laws and directives implemented by the EU - especially those concerning domestic animal slaughter and sale, alcohol and food consumption - including the

obligation to conform to pre-established standards, represent an offense to the peasant way of being. By a series of processes such as *disembedding* and *delocalizing*, the local producer is separated by his/her social and cultural environment through economic constraints that reconfigure peasant values and lead to a repositioning of personhood within society. This repositioning would finally be the equivalent of transforming the peasant into an entrepreneur and of the small subsistence household into an agricultural farm based on efficiency and profit. This change takes place by transforming peasant values and is essentially a project where rationality and economic thinking dominate over other ways of conceiving life, personhood and society.

While in the case of de-peasantization and re-peasantization, issues seem to be debatable, things seem to be much clearer regarding their system of values. The wide projects led by Redfield, Verdery and Fox prove that there are radical changes, already visible from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sturt 2010; Thomas and Znaniecki 1996), that had affected the peasants' way of being and thinking, first in the highly industrialized countries and, later, after World War II, also in those countries with strong agrarian traditions and large peasant populations. Discussing England's case study, Kevin Walsh saw a direct connection between industrialization and the disappearance of a way of being that had been linked to a specific perception of time, space and, in the meantime, of certain values that used to come along:

The Industrial Revolution intensified people's experiences of life in many ways. Factory work imposed a rigid awareness of and adherence to time. An increase in population, combined with the experience of urbanization, led to the destruction of insular rural communities with an appreciably slower way of life, even if it was harder. All of these experiences combined to impose a different spatial-temporal awareness, an awareness which contributed to the loss of a sense of place (Walsh, 1992:22-23).

Even the beginnings of the scientific research on folk plays done by Thomas Fairman Ordish are linked to the fear of witnessing these forms of culture vanish under the influence of the modernity concerted factors that produced radical transformations in the peasant universe (Ordish 1891). What actually changed in the rural world is not only a mode of production based on family work as subsistence agricultural farm but also a set of norms, principles and values. As seen in Ploeg's analyses, this mode of small-scale agricultural production could actually last more, while the rural workers concerned could organize and engage in a

permanent fight against the *Empire* for their rights as small agricultural producers, eventually forming a New Peasantry. But what is gone with the advance of modernity is that system of values specific to customary communities around which the entire social-cultural life of the villages revolved. Mummers' plays were part of this system created by human communities before being replaced by the institutionalized forms of culture generated by the Industrial Revolution, including herein a new system of values.

## **2. Labor Migration and Peasant System of Values**

For me, as researcher, the most conclusive of these radical transformations was best revealed following the analysis of the phenomenon of labor migration. Together with the expansion of cable television networks and the large-scale widespread of computers and internet in the rural world, labor migration proved to be the 'Trojan horse' (Bourdieu 2008:178) of the disintegration of the customary communities in the area I have been studying. Transnational migrants, caught in a permanent come-and-go between their villages of origin in north-eastern Romania and their jobs in Western Europe, have become the most eloquent proof that the worlds on the TV screens and internet pages are not only a simple virtual reality, but really exist and may be touched, felt and lived. Transnational migrants have brought the most consistent proofs that, beyond the borders of the small village communities they had grown up in, there are people of different races, ethnicities and nationalities whose existence revolves around a value system different of that they had experienced when they built their own identities in the rural universe of their villages.

During winter holidays, I have often witnessed interesting and sometimes passionate discussions between migrants coming from Italy, Spain and Portugal, and their family members, on topics such as values, principles and moral behaviors. Labor migrants were talking about values totally different of those of their own village, noticed in their journeys in various people and groups of Western Europe. All these discussions have aroused my scientific interest on the complex phenomenon of labor migration, and have in the meantime made me smile, remembering my own naiveté and misunderstanding when confronted with the world of western capitalism, at the beginning of my experience as immigrant in the United States of America.

Since I was an emigrant myself, I have often been asked to express my opinion on multiple topics during these talks, from my 'privileged' status of connoisseur of the Western world. And it was not a few times that I felt I had to break down a series of myths and

illusions villagers had about American society, culture and life. While being involved in these sometimes very passionate talks, I would realize that I was thus also contributing to crumbling down the system of rural values around which human existence has been revolving for a very long time. Even the nickname the inhabitants of Heleşteni gave me - "the American" - spoke about my status of intruder into a world that had to redefine its role and identity in front of the curious eyes of an anthropologist. But the notion of 'anthropologist' was new, too, and needed to be explained; meanwhile, explaining it meant redefining the rural identity now perceived under the specialist's magnifying glass. Inside this picture, the anthropologist himself would often be perceived as an eccentric and weird professor, yet having "a special gift in communicating with all sorts of people". I managed to understand this interplay of insights and reflections on the mind mirror of villagers due to the close friends I had managed to make during all these years in Ruginoasa and especially in Heleşteni. All this made me empathize more with the persons I met, notably when talking about the loss of rural values and the phenomenon of labor migration, both of which affected the villagers where I conducted my field research.

In recent years, the emigrant has become a continuous invisible presence, being always brought back to the village world, even when physically he or she was not there; the talks between locals, social networks like Facebook, phone conversations and Skype contributed to this. This entire dense social network made it possible even for the peasant who had been least connected to the migration phenomenon and without relatives migrating abroad to be up to date with the realities of Western Europe by means of the village gossip. Paradoxically, this peculiarity of rural societies - that of discussing about the behavior and actions of the rural community's members - had become the most expedient means for spreading the stories of migrants and, implicitly, of Western realities. Almost effortlessly from my part, I have managed to find out the most successful stories of the emigrants who "made it", but also of those who "failed it". Emigrants had managed to get a good job, to send significant amounts of money home each month, to buy expensive cars and houses for themselves or to come back to their own village to open a successful business - briefly, they had quickly turned into models of success. However, on the other hand, the disintegration of certain families, the premature and violent death of emigrants in work accidents or following crimes, suicides, alcohol and drug abuse warned about the potential dangers that an emigrant could face. Listing and analyzing all these stories - with some enchanting and other terrible ones - might easily turn into a separate work about migration.

### 3. A "Common" Story of a "Banal" Labor Migrant

Of all the stories on labor migration I have heard, one made a special impression on me. The reason is that it contains in it the archetypal story of the ordinary emigrant - the one leaving the house and the family for a dream that might or might not come true. That is the story of Alin, a young man from the village of Oboroceni, who had been raised by his grandparents since the age of four. The last time I interviewed him was on April the 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, on Skype, after having heard from his village friends that in 2016 he had migrated once again to Italy. In the summer of 2012, when I had spoken to him for the last time, he seemed to be quite satisfied, helping his grandparents in agriculture, and spending his weekend evenings at the disco in Heleşteni. There, he would have a beer with his friends and flirt with girls of his age, leaving the impression of a man who felt happy and in his element. However, in April 2017, since the very beginning of our interview, his voice unveiled a sense of uncertainty as if an invisible burden crushed his soul. During our talk, he told me the circumstances and the reasons why he had taken the decision of going back to Italy.

Since 2013, he had been working as a taxi driver in the town of Paşcani, 20 kilometers away from his village. Because he was working on longer shifts, sometimes even for 24 hours continuously, he had to rent a place to live in town, at a pretty high rate. The taxi company he was working for offered him 30% of the profit he made. With this money, he also had to pay the gas used each day, and what he was left with would barely be enough for him to live from one day to the next. In addition to these low incomes, Paşcani was a former workers' center, important for the industry of communist Romania, now fallen into an accelerated process of de-industrialization, with an impoverished middle class that would rarely get a taxi drive. In fact, the taxi service would be profitable only for a few months per year, "when *stranieri* came back home", Alin declared, using the Italian word for *foreigner* to call the emigrants from Paşcani. This meant only during winter holidays, the time before and after Easter, as well as the summer months.

All these facts made Alin step once again on the migration path to Italy. His mother, living in Italy since 2009, was the one who helped him find a place to work. So, on foreign land and after many years, Alin managed to partially re-establish the relationship with his mother "even if things could no longer be as if I had been grown up by her ever since I was a child", as he declared during the interview. But working in Italy was not easy at all. For 11

months, from September to late July, he would work for nine hours per day, six days per week in an eggplant greenhouse.

Physical work is not very difficult because I've been used to it ever since I was a child. But the working conditions are extremely difficult. Inside the greenhouse, the temperature is between 45 and 50 degrees Celsius. I work as in a sauna. More, I often have to splash the plants with pesticides and herbicides. I could say that the uniform and mask the company offers me protect me to an extent of about 35%. But those substances reach one's wrists and it's impossible to avoid touching them completely. In addition, later on, all the people working there had problems with their lungs because of the moisture of the air they breath there everyday. In a month, I earn 600 Euro and I don't have to pay the rent. But of the 600 Euro, I still have to buy food and cigarettes, so I am left with nothing more than 300 Euro per month. I want to invest this money into getting a driver's license for all vehicles, including buses, and then try to find myself a job as a large truck driver somewhere in the European Union... Unfortunately, I cannot help my grandparents at all and this hurts the most. But thanks God they are healthy and don't need my help. What can you do?! As a young man, it's difficult nowadays to build yourself a future and to form a family. Although I live with my girlfriend and she works just like me, we can't yet think about forming a family... My only joy is when I go back home for the winter holidays and wander with the mummies. Then I put on the mask my father made before dying and I feel as if he lived once again through me throughout the entire ritual (Alin Zaharia, 26 years old, April 24, 2017, Skype Interview).

The interview with Alin reinforced a conviction that had lingered in my mind since 2011. The livelihood of the human being is a long term project, but also an adaptation to the environment. Even if labor migration and the work conditions offered by Western European corporations are sometimes deplorable, the embracing of a dangerous project such as migration could represent for many people a better solution than to stay in their own village and to go on performing the small-scale agricultural labor. One could not expect peasants - the people caught in one of the history's pockets based on small-scale agricultural production - to remain unchanged when the economy, society and world around them, based on a more efficient and more economically profitable mode of production, are developing and changing.

#### 4. The New Denominations in the Countryside versus Mummers' Plays

My view on the transformations of peasant system of values has progressively shaped over time. I have reached conclusions like those above gradually, during various stages of my research. However, there were several memorable meetings that were true revelations in terms of changing my previous perspectives regarding the relations of peasants to their own customs and traditions. One of these meetings took place on December the 25<sup>th</sup> 2010, when I talked to Maria Ilașcă, a woman aged 90. By the end of that year, together with my colleague Monica Heintz, I started recording for a common project - a film about the winter rituals in Heleșteni. Our first intention was to introduce into the film the voices of elder locals, too, who would talk about mummers' plays in their youth, thus offering us an overall perspective on the changes these customs had gone through during a longer period. Meeting Mrs. Maria completely changed our plans. Aged 90, the woman stubbornly lived in an old house with no electricity, no running water and no toilet inside the house. This happened despite the fact that her grandchildren had offered to help her install all these facilities. The old woman had repeatedly stated - for us, too - that she wanted to live her life "in the world the way God had created it, not the way humans changed it to make their life easier" (Maria Ilașcă, 90 years old, Hărmăneasa village, December 25, 2010, Interview).

Mrs. Maria's house was small and had been built right after World War II in Hărmăneasa village, in the old peasant style, from rammed adobe and with solid acacia beams. Inside the house, the only source of light was an old oil lamp, and the walls had been decorated with peasant carpets hand woven at the loom Maria Ilașcă used to have when she was young. For a folklore collector as I was, this meeting seemed to be an unexpected opportunity. From the very first moments of our meeting, I felt as if I had been teleported to a lost world I had never hoped I would have the chance to see. The talk I had with this extraordinary person was also extremely rich in information. Gifted with an exceptional memory, she revealed to me amazing events from the locality's past, and gave me an account of the way winter customs used to unfold during her youth. In my folklore collector mind, she must have been the kind of housewife who would wait for mummers' teams in a state of excitement, in front of her gate, with freshly baked *cozonaci* (sweet bread) and *plăcinte* (traditional pies).

Because of all these reasons, I oriented our talk towards that mummers, and naturally the next question concerned the preparations she used to do before welcoming the mummers.



The answer I got was completely puzzling for me. My colleague Monica Heintz later told me that she was also very surprised to hear it. Mrs. Maria Ilașcă had not been welcoming carolers for more than 20 years. More than two decades before, together with her younger son - aged 62 at the moment the interview took place - who also joined our talks, they had become the members of a Christian cult newly appeared in the comună: *Creștinii după Evanghelie/The Gospel Christians*. Following my question and Mrs. Ilașcă's answer, her son's intervention was also particularly relevant:

When I hear the *Goat* roaming in the street, I feel a strange emotion inside my soul. And probably this happens because I remember my childhood when I used to join the *Goat*, too. But now, that I have embraced true faith, I know that I have to suppress these feelings. Therefore, I stay indoors and I leave them pass by without doing anything. Because our parsons from the gathering taught us that the *Goat* and the *Deer* are in fact devilish embodiments that must not get in touch with the people who want their soul to stay innocent and who have true faith in God (Vasile Ilașcă, 62 years old, Hărmăneasa village, December 25, 2010, Interview).

Once again, I had to admit that my folklorist vision, influenced by Romantic nationalism and documentaries such as *Zestrea Românilor (Romanians' Dowry)* had tricked me. I consoled myself thinking that at least I was not the only one starting with this perspective, as I would later discover while reading the works of authors with a background in folklore and anthropology (see Bendix 1997). Following this meeting, I decided with my colleague Monica Heintz that we should focus our efforts on those who perform these traditions nowadays and who promote them strongly. They were the young ones in the village. With these ideas in mind, we started to take shots for the film that was finalized in September 2011 – *Behind The Masks*. In the film, the leadings roles belonged to teenagers and children, as well as to young migrants who would come back to the country to celebrate winter holidays with their families.

In the months and years to come, I found out that in the Heleșteni comună and almost in each neighboring locality there were a few hundred persons - usually between 1-5% of the population of these localitiess - who had changed from being Christian Orthodox or Catholic to being Pentecostal, Baptist, Gospel Christians or Jehovah's Witnesses (*Direcția Județeană de Statistică Iași/The Iași County Statistics Direction, Population Census 2011,*

<http://www.iasi.insse.ro>). Following such change, the persons in question would be more reserved about village winter rituals, especially those involving mummers.

I managed to interview these peasants and thus observed that many of them were older and had a rigid perspective on the moral rules of the community, guiding their own behavior based on a series of very strict moral principles. Almost all of them made acid comments about the shameless behavior of the young people nowadays and on the excessive permissiveness of the postsocialist society. I frequently heard them saying sharply and decisively: "Young people nowadays have no more shame!" For them, this state was also representative for a divine sign. The plant called *Daucus Carota*, also known in Moldova as *Floarea Ruşinii* (*The Flower of Shame*), had a large white inflorescence with a red point in the middle. It was said that in the past the small red point in the middle of the white inflorescence used to be larger, whereas in recent years it had grown smaller, almost to being invisible. Accordingly, the white of the inflorescence symbolized the human cheek and the red in the middle stood for face blush in morally embarrassing situations. The fact that the red color had decreased in recent years was the divine proof that the young people nowadays are shameless and, consequently, no longer blush as a result of embarrassing situations (Rus 2014).

Faced with this interesting picture, my hypothesis based on observations and interviews was that older peasants and other morally rigorous persons nostalgic towards a once cohesive village community - nowadays lost in the midst of the postsocialist chaos - had joined the Christian cults that had entered the Moldavian villages during the last decades (Idem 2014). Based on a series of more dogmatic norms and more rigid principles, these cults promised a kind of more cohesive human community, less atomized, more protected from the modern world's temptations, and united in the spirit of a "more authentic" belief. These were some of the motivations I had managed to identify behind the phenomenon of abandoning Orthodoxy or Catholicism in favor of cults that had recently entered the history of the Moldavian localities. In fact, those embracing this tendency, joining recent cults such as the Pentecostal, Gospel Christians, Baptist and Jehovah's Witnesses adepts expressed just another trend of the modern world. These Christian cults were all products of the religious reforms starting in the eve of the modern age. All the reforms gradually led to a dissipation of the control exercised by the central authority of the Orthodox and Catholic churches on the village customary societies where religion and the corresponding value system were essential elements of social cohesion.

## 5. Labor Migration versus Mummers' Plays

For my research, the fact that the most active promoters of rural traditions were not necessarily older generations, but younger ones - teenagers and children - was becoming more and more relevant over time. The only thing was that young people had to make drastic choices between migrating and staying within the village, between playing computer games and preparing for the *Dance of The Deer*, between going to the disco and joining the *Dance of The Goat*, between watching television and wandering with the mummers.

Understanding this complex situation made me approach migration and other challenges of the globalized Romanian society by means of two methods that are less used by anthropology: a photo elicitation and a session of essay writing. Both events took place between March 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 and April 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, with the support of the principals and teachers of the two local schools in Heleşteni, and the active involvement of two mixed groups of pupils (grades 5-8) from the two primary schools in Oboroceni and Heleşteni. The first group, consisting of 21 pupils from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, aged 10-12, was involved in a photo elicitation event. The second one, with 18 pupils from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, aged 13-14, were involved in the essay writing session.

The first event involved a passage through more stages, as well as the use of more complex logistics. After forming the group of 21 students that were about to join this event, I briefly gave them a 30 minutes long lecture, explaining the perspective of recent heritage studies and of UNESCO on tangible and intangible cultural heritage. During the next half an hour, I drew them into an interactive exercise based on questions and answers that would make them conclude by themselves what exactly from the village universe could fit the concept of cultural heritage. Without giving them my own definite answer to this question, I let them reflect alone on the topic I had advanced. The following days, I gave them digital photo cameras and asked them to take five shots of those things or events that they considered to be part of the cultural heritage of the comună.

The photos they had taken expressed the inventiveness and creativity of these pupils, as well as their close relationship to the cultural heritage of their own locality. Many photos captured monuments and old buildings in the locality, as well as the three churches, the village cemeteries, the old fountain sweeps, casemates surviving from the front line of World War II, and the *troițe* (painted crosses) at the crossroads. Dressed in folk costumes, the pupils themselves and their parents appeared in several photos, too. Household items such as old

traditional carpets, the cellar where food was kept, the tools for preparing cheese and butter, the weaving loom and even means of transport frequently used in the village like the horse-ridden carriage appeared in the pupils' photos. However, there were also photos that spoke directly about intangible cultural heritage. Dishes considered to be traditional - such as *sarmale* (stuffed cabbage) and *mămăligă* (polenta) with sour cream, prepared in clay pots - were also immortalized a few times. The masks mummers wear during the New Year, the helmet worn by the bear-leaders, a grandmother preparing the wool tops for spinning, but also shots of the television or computer screen showing local recordings of New Year teams like the *Deer*, *Goat* and *Small Horses* were also present.

Upon reception of the photos, I would have another talk with the pupils, asking them to describe in a few words their relation to local cultural heritage, and their involvement or absence of the desire to join the rituals mentioned above. In most cases, except for the pupils who belonged to the *Pentecostal* or the *Gospel Christians* cults, children used to be involved in these rituals one way or another. Even the girls whose presence was forbidden in plays like the *Deer* confirmed their passion for these rituals, mentioning their anxious wait throughout the entire period of the winter holidays. At the end of the dialogue, I would ask each pupil what job he/she would like to have after finishing school. There, the answers ranged among narrow possibilities - the top preference were professions such as physician, lawyer, teacher and agricultural engineer. Other jobs like that of driver, priest and foreman had also been mentioned. Finally, I would draw the pupils' attention to the fact that in most cases such careers would take them away from the village world and, as a result, from the local cultural heritage.

Surprised by my final observation, most of them reacted in a way that revealed their cognitive dissonance. A braver boy gave me a memorable answer: "Yes, teacher, we care about traditions, but we also have to build a life of our own!" A girl gave me a similar answer: "In life, you cannot give up your dream! You have to move on!" Other pupils reassured me that, wherever they worked in Romania or throughout Europe, they would come back to the village in the winter to spend the holidays next to their family. In the meantime, there were a few who felt embarrassed faced with this choice and could not give any answer at all.

Nevertheless, all these answers seemed quite relevant since they revealed an elementary aspect: no matter how strong the attachment to local rural cultural heritage is, the

modern world trends and the aim of a successful life are powerful forces that lead people behavior and decisions. And the way success and life accomplishment are perceived is inextricably connected inside the pupils' mind-set to the graduation of higher education programs and, implicitly, to urban life.

The second event - that of essay writing - although simpler in terms of logistics, managed to unveil a universe that was very rich in information and social perceptions regarding migration to foreign countries. Just as in the case of the photo elicitation event, the first stage of this session consisted of a one hour long preliminary meeting with the 18 pupils involved. During the first 20 minutes, I presented them a series of notions about essay writing and gave them a few indications about the way this genre should be approached. During the next 20 minutes, I taught them a few general notions about migration. The last part of that meeting was dedicated to an interactive exercise where the pupils tried to find examples and familiar cases especially in their *comună* that would be representative for international migration. In the end, I explained the task I gave them: writing an essay on international migration that would include situations they knew from the locality they live in.

With their essays, the pupils wrote down a series of social representations that mirrored the complex universe of migration, both that from the *comună* and region of Iași and that of Romania, too. Many fragments of the pupils' essays expressed in a crude form the sometimes harsh reality of migration; anyway, the idealistic visions and perceptions linked to the phenomenon were not absent, either. Of the most frequent topics the pupils had chosen, I would mention: the causes of migration, its benefits, but also the difficulties Romanian migrants face, and the dangers this phenomenon usually involves. Socio-economic aspects regarding the Romanians' migration to foreign countries were also tackled. One of these was the "brain drain", and the other one was the remittance sent by migrants to the families they had left home. Last but not least, the fate of local cultural heritage with the increasing exodus to Western European countries and the cultural differences faced by villagers in the West were also mentioned.

The main cause and issue pupils believed to be at the root of migration was the lack of money and jobs. "People go abroad to earn their daily bread, to have their own money, not to borrow it from others and then owe it to them. Nowadays, *money* is the most important. If you don't have it, there's no way you can make it", a pupil called M.C. wrote in her essay. "Most people go to foreign countries because of the hard life, lack of money and the

shortcomings in Romania", A.B. mentioned in her work. "The people's departure is caused by the lack of jobs and lack of money. My uncles work in Italy from morning until late at night, but work there is very well paid whereas in our country *you* work and *you* get almost nothing", P.P. concluded in his essay. "My aunt went to Italy to earn money and to offer a better life to Mihai and Mihaela, her children", A.M.P. wrote down, providing in the meantime an original definition of migration: "Emigration represents all the people who go from one state to another, for a certain period, to earn money. After which they come back to their country." Similarly, but with a better articulated economic vision, M.M., another pupil, defined migration as follows: "Most emigrants move to new regions or countries together with their family members, hoping to find better work conditions and a more developed labor market."

Corruption and nepotism as causes for migration are clearly emphasized in G.M.'s essay: "My cousin Mihaela graduated from the Faculty of Geography - French Language in Cluj and got 10 (the top mark) in all her exams... Although an eminent student, after graduation she had to face huge walls and closed doors whenever she hoped she would find a job... Her disappointment and hopelessness grew every day..." The rest of the essay presents the successful story of the young graduate who, after migrating to America, married an American and got two well-paid jobs. "So migration may lead to negative phenomena as population decrease, loss of valuable Romanians who are not truly appreciated", the essay concluded. "Young people migrate to faraway countries to use what they had studied in Romania", M.M.'s essay says, following the same idea. Finally, his conclusion is gloomy and expresses his fear regarding Romania's future on the long run: "Step by step, if this situation goes on at the same speed, our country will vanish from the map and from the globe."

The negative face of migration appears in E.M.'s essay, too. He writes about the case of a family friend who lost his life in Italy, despite the fact that he had become what one could consider a successful immigrant in Italy: "My dad's friend Mihai went to Italy to offer a better life to his family... He gained a lot of money as construction worker and he would send that home... Missing the family he had left in the village, he started drinking. One day, he climbed the building scaffolding when he was drunk and fell from the fourth floor... He died in hospital after being in a comma for four days." In the same essay, E.M. underlines other negative consequences of migration to foreign countries: "Children who are left alone in the care of relatives or even by themselves become addicted to alcohol, drugs or suffer from depression that even the psychologist cannot treat." His essay ends with a warning: "An

individual leaves in order to offer a better life to both him/her and the family, but never knows what's eventually going to happen."

The political decay of the years following the December 1989 Revolution - perceived as a cause of the economic problems and the poverty in the countryside - was not avoided by pupils, either: "Sick of Bănescu's<sup>50</sup> hot pepper smoke, of Iliescu's<sup>51</sup> dill and of Năstase's<sup>52</sup> wormwood, we are waiting for the moment when our dream shall come true... I cannot wait for the day when I'll grow up and go towards some sunny side... If things go on like this, I am seriously considering the idea of settling down in Australia where there is no winter and where schools don't need wood to heat their classrooms where teachers and pupils alike stay paralyzed by the winter frost", D.I. wrote in her paper. The fact that migration might show up for reasons independent of the people's will is mentioned in A.M.P.'s essay: "Many people here leave the country to find a job, even if they don't want to separate from their families, but are forced to because in Romania there are not enough jobs."

The positive face of migration, remittances and capital investment in the *comună* were not left aside either by this essay's author: "The families who had left from Heleşteni to foreign countries started to build houses and to invest capital in the locality. Some opened animal farms, others opened shops where the people of the commune can get what they need... I believe that, for my family and even for the village, my uncle's departure to Italy has meant a lot. Had he stayed here, I would not have seen so many beautiful places, I would not have found out so many new things, we would have been poorer, I would not have learnt what it means to make a gift, our village would have had a large and modern house less", A.J. wrote in her essay.

"Emigration is useful", A.J. wrote, offering the example of a neighbor who had worked in Italy and after many years came back to Heleşteni where he invested a large amount of money into buying an extant pool and transforming it into a fish farm. However, even in this case, the cultural differences between the birth village and the targeted country of the migrant proved to be very strong: "He could not get used to the customs and culture of

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<sup>50</sup> Traian Bănescu, Romania's president between 2004-2014; the smoke of hot pepper is associated with his image because of its asphyxiating pungent qualities.

<sup>51</sup> Ion Iliescu, Romania's president between 1989-1996 și 2000-2004. The dill associated to his image could represent the low salaries and low purchasing power salaries had back then. In Heleşteni area, people use the expression "dill money" for saying little money, since dill is very cheap especially as seasonal plant.

<sup>52</sup> Adrian Năstase, prime-minister of Romania between 2000-2004. Wormwood is a plant with a bitter taste and it could be related to the despising attitude and proverbial haughtiness this politician is well-known to have had towards his fellow citizens.

that place. All his plans during a whole year had to do with the two weeks of holiday he would spend in the village next to his dear ones." The same idea was emphasized by M.M. from the very beginning of his work: "In some cases, emigrants move to countries that are profoundly different from that of origin in matters of cultural, economic and religious traditions."

Even if the relationship between emigration and local heritage had not been discussed during my meeting with the pupils, some of them referred to it: "If people move to another country, this affects the traditions inherited from our ancestors. They are going to be less frequently performed and will eventually vanish. If traditions are lost, it's a bad thing. Traditions make us remember our ancestors and the way they used to live. Emigration affects the history of our ancestors, and if we leave, we begin to forget our traditions and to adopt those of another country", D.O. wrote in his essay.

A synthetic and revealing picture of the relationship between the *comună* of Heleşteni and its inhabitants during communist and post-communist times belonged to A.J. Her essay was the best written and documented one I had received: "Because of the large distance from the closest town, the lack of paved roads and railway, the village of Heleşteni, although situated in an area with very fertile land, could not be attractive for younger population. After 1989 Revolution, the large factories located in the towns around the village, started to go bankrupt and to close their gates. The village's "sons" and "daughters" who had gone in search of a life better than in the native muddy land during Communism, were obliged to look for means of existence somewhere else. Since in their native village there was no other economy except for agricultural labor, and this was done with primitive tools, a part of the jobless started a journey outside their village, trying their luck in Western countries where workforce was needed."

These essays and the entire educational event I had created proved that the teenagers in Heleşteni were mature, aware of the migration phenomenon, knew personally cases or emigrants and even had family members who had left the country. On the other hand, it proved they were up to date with the local cultural heritage that they loved and often performed. Between the two opposing realities - traditions on the one hand and leaving the *comună* on the other hand - the balanced inclined towards the second. I found out this at the end of 2017 when I got in touch with the teachers in the area, and thus found out details about



the pupils' destiny, more than five years after the two pedagogical events I had implemented in 2012.

Of the pupils involved in the photo elicitation event, 19 were attending high-school in various towns: ten in Iași, seven in Pașcani and two in towns outside Iași county. Of them, five were daily commuting to Pașcani, and the rest were living in the cities where they studied. Only two pupils had remained in Heleșteni without going to high-school, and one of these two had recently died in a stupid accident inside his parents' house.

The situation of the elder group was more interesting and conclusive, since some of the pupils involved in the essay writing event were already adults and working in different fields. Of the 18 pupils involved in the essay writing event, three had migrated permanently and were working in three different countries: Italy, Germany and Belgium. Another pupil was a seasonal migrant to Germany where he worked in constructions. Other six had graduated from high-school and were working in the towns around Heleșteni (three in Iași and three in Pașcani), having the permanent address in these towns. Other six were attending higher education studies in important university centers: five in Iași and one in Constanța. Only two of the group were still living in Heleșteni and worked in agriculture next to their parents.

Even in a remote *comună* like Heleșteni, all these tendencies speak about the great transformations of peasant livelihood and especially about the radical transformations coming from the mainstream society like streams that erode the peasant system of values. The customary community guaranteeing the existence of this system of values was a complex network of vessels through which mummings' plays and other community rituals could be maintained in the oral memory of the community, being performed and transmitted from one generation to another. The moment these cultural micro-systems started to be engulfed in the increasingly larger planetary cultural eco-system called global culture, the endemic life forms populating it - including herein the values of the rural world - started to be replaced by the values of modern society, including the propensity toward consumerism, economic profit and capitalism.

Caught between the conservative tendency of elderly persons to look for more cohesive societies based on more rigorous moral principles, and an increasingly obvious desire for emancipation of the young generation, the fate of mummings' plays seemed to be sealed on the long run. This revelation did not only belong to me, as researcher, but also to

many of those who were concerned with the continuation of these rural customs in the remote future: local politicians, businessmen, national and county cultural authorities and, last but not least, the villagers who were attached to the customs. Inside the mind of all the persons whom I had extensively been talking to on this topic throughout the years, a similar idea was begotten: the safeguard of the rituals under these circumstances seemed the only viable choice in order to guarantee the transmission to future generations. But the most widespread idea advanced as safeguarding model was that of local folk festivals. Under these conditions, as any other researcher interested in safeguarding these forms of local heritage, I asked myself whether this patrimonialization model of rituals menaced by extinction was truly viable and, above all, whether it fit the needs and wishes of the local communities that had been their source and cultural transmission belt throughout many generations.

### **C. Policies of Patrimonialization in Postsocialist Romania**

#### **1. The Community Rituals versus The Patrimonialized Forms of Rural Culture**

In the afternoon of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, I was once again in the house of my hosts from the village of Oboroceni, Heleşteni *comună*, waiting for carolers and mummers' play teams. A good friend of the Hâra family, Mr. Gheorghită Chelaru, and his wife, Mrs. Mariana, were the first guests welcomed that day. Like many other 45-50 years old inhabitants of Heleşteni, they had migrated during communism to a highly industrialized city center – in this case Braşov – where they were still living, but kept being intimately connected to the world of their native village. *Just like many other migrant villagers they used to spend the winter holidays in their native village.*

Sitting at the table together with my host, Mr. Constantin, Mr. Gheorghită started to reveal memories dating back to the time of his youth when he wandered with his *Deer* team through the village. The discussion reached a point where the two men began to compare the vivid world of their childhood's village to the shadow in had turned into in present times. Mr. Gheorghită's intervention was revealing and clarified the issue in this respect. He lived on a small street with only ten houses, just 200 meters away from my host's home. During his childhood, Mr. Gheorghită recalled, all those ten houses would welcome the *Deer* and *Goat* teams, while now, with an "aged, impoverished and sick" population, only three of the households opened their doors to mummers. This remark made my host react. Mr. Constantin replied that this state of affairs urged him, as mayor, to intervene in preventing the

disappearance of local customs. That moment, as faced with a revelation, Mr. Gheorghiuță replied in a manner I found memorable:

Do you remember, Costică? In the 1970s, when we were teenagers, the mayor of our *comună* did not care at all about how we performed our winter rituals and customs. On the contrary, the mayoralty collected a tax to grant us the right to herald through the village. Now, you – as mayor – and the township hall representatives, are heavily involved in organizing these activities, and encourage the young guys to engage in these winter rituals, and they fuss a lot. I really don't understand how this mutation was produced! (Gheorghiuță Chelaru, 49 years old, Oboroceni village, January 1, 2015, field notes).

Unaware, Mr. Gheorghiuță had touched a sensitive issue that had become a central theme in heritage studies over the last two decades: how and why has the oral culture transmitted by a community (up to a certain moment without any external interventions) recently become the target of safeguard, a process involving structures and people in connection to state institutions and international organizations? The 2003 UNESCO Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage revolved around this important issue. The Convention was aimed at safeguarding those "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage " (UNESCO 2003 Convention for Intangible Cultural Heritage).

This text gave birth to a rich literature revolving around the topic of safeguarding the cultural forms threatened by extinction. Among the purposes of the convention, one could also find those aiming at "raising awareness of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage", "ensuring mutual respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned", and "providing for international cooperation and assistance".

The birth of the text and of the legislative framework used for the implementation of this convention was a difficult process that required the reconciliation of several traditions, histories, discourses and trends across the globe, which were sometimes contradictory. Natives often used different terms and conceptual frameworks to formulate their ideas and conceptions about their own cultures and oral traditions. Concepts eroded in anthropological and historical discourse such as *tradition* (Gross 1992), or coming from a direction associated

with the disturbing history of colonialism, such as *folklore*, were eventually replaced by the *intangible cultural heritage* (Testa 2016). Despite these conceptual efforts made by professionals and scholars who created the 2003 Convention text, in the discourse of locals in various parts of the globe, these terms have never been eliminated (Idem 2016), while questions and dilemmas such as those stated at the beginning of this section continued to bloom in the minds of the subjects involved in the practice, maintenance and transmission of the customs, and who had formulated their questions and speeches in their own terms.

In the years following the implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, there have been many voices in the field of heritage studies that highlighted that the safeguarding process, especially when it was preceded by an insidious safeguarding state tradition, accompanied by onerous interests and interference of the political factor, was not a neutral process, but an active and sometimes negative one, leading to the creation of a different type of culture than the one that was supposed to be safeguarded.

In a 2007 article, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out that “localized descent heritage” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2007) belong to communities and remain connected to community life, while intangible cultural heritage belongs to humanity and has its place into the global public domain, thus being part of the global cultural commons. “[H]umanity does not hold world heritage in common in the way that each *cultural masterpiece* is held in common by the community that sustains it” (Idem 2006:185). For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett “heritage is created through metacultural operations that extend museological values and methods to living persons, their knowledge, practices, artifacts, social worlds, and life spaces” (Ibidem 2006:161). All these operations “alter the relationship of cultural assets to those who are identified with them, as well as to others” (Ibidem 2006:162).

Following some of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s arguments, Regina Bendix (Bendix 2009) defines the position of heritage as situated between economy and politics. She uses the term *heritagisation* to describe the “jungle of multivalences” involved when diverse organizations and institutions that belong to national states or transnational entities like UNESCO identify, select, value, protect, preserve and finally create cultural heritage. Heritagisation always means the inclusion of certain cultural aspects in the safeguarding process, while at the same time operates an exclusion or marginalization of some other cultural practices that were not included in the process. As a result of these operations, one idea becomes crystal-clear: “Cultural heritage does not exist, it is made” (Idem 2009:255). In the process of creation,

high social value is added to heritage, together with the capacity “to foster positive identification within groups or entire polities” (Ibidem 2009:258). But, together with the positive aspects of heritagisation, several animosities and tensions arise as well. The reason is that “the symbolic capital inherent in heritage invites social, economic and political contestants to vie for it; heritage becomes another tool or variable in the struggles for power on local and supralocal levels of governance” (Ibidem 2009:263). Everything considered, one distinction became transparent from Bendix’ analysis: on one side, there are “habitual practices and everyday experiences – the changeable fabric of action and meaning that anthropologists call ‘culture’ ” (Ibidem 2009:255) which are rarely or never subjected to evaluation; on the other side, “actors choose privileged excerpts and imbue them with status and value” – these cultural forms will be transformed into intangible cultural heritage expressions that have often turned into objects of scrutiny, nomination, and evaluation from the heritage professionals of the modern society which is also an “evaluation society” (Ibidem 2009:265).

In a dialogue published under the title *Patrimonialization – Processes, Tendencies, Currents and Aspects* that I signed together with Bogdan Neagota, we analyze the term "patrimonialization", a synonym of "heritagisation" and "safeguarding", explaining how patrimonialization processes have worked in various local, national and transnational contexts in Europe both in the past and nowadays (Rus and Neagota 2016). Unlike authors such as Brian Graham, G.J. Ashworth, and J.E. Tunbridge who link the search for heritage to the modern period (Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000:11), Neagota does not connect this process to modernity, but with societies going through a crisis of identity, be they ancient, medieval or modern. During political, social or moral crises, empires like that of Augustus and Charles the Great looked back to the past in order to find moral reference points. They patrimonialized certain cultural forms and vestiges of the past that were transformed into important marks of identity for the citizens of those empires. As an ethnologist with a rich field experience in several European countries, Neagota talks about more recent patrimonialization efforts in Italy, France, Switzerland, Serbia and Romania. From his perspective:

Patrimonialization is a process of re-semanticization whereby a cultural object belonging to a specific cultural system is extracted and integrated into another cultural system through morphological adjustment and re-significance. In other words, patrimonialization takes place when certain cultural phenomena, behaviors, and

representations are taken out of their genetic context and are moved to a different context, through an external intervention (Idem 2016:107).

Based on my extended field research in rural Romania, Moldova and Ukraine, in the same article I used a metaphor borrowed from biology in order to explain my understanding of patrimonialization:

I see patrimonialization as a kind of aquarium-ization (creation of an aquarium-like environment), that is, the removal of a fish from its natural environment to be exposed to the sight of tourists or biologists, let's say. But it is no longer the same ocean fish that was part of an ecosystem and contributed to the maintenance of this ecosystem through its life and activity, but one artificially fed and maintained by a continuous external intervention (Ibidem 2016:110).

From the perspective of the two field researchers, both metaphors of *re-semanticization* and *aquarium-ization* explain what happens to rural cultural forms when they transition from community rituals to intangible cultural heritage through the process of patrimonialization led by nation states.

I don't know if these explanations and theories would please Mr. Gheorghiiță. As ethnologist Alessandro Testa also shows, sometimes locals and natives use their own conceptual framework and their own terms to define the realities encountered in their everyday lives, and these do not necessarily coincide with those used by scholars (Testa 2016: 236). What coincides in this case is precisely the basic idea expressed in the two types of discourse: in recent years, more elements of the local oral culture in various parts of the globe have become the subject of scrutiny, research and outsiders' curiosity. This trend has developed at the same time with the continuous rise and increase of the fear caused by the disappearance of these cultural forms. All these processes have created a new type of culture - the culture of safeguarding - which, paradoxically, has sometimes developed alongside a still alive rural culture that was, nevertheless, subjected to enormous pressure coming from certain processes and phenomena of modern society.

Regarding the culture of safeguarding, in the last decades Romania has witnessed the meeting between the more recent trend of preserving local culture - a trend specific to modernity and to societies experiencing a crisis of identity - and the tradition of an unfortunate ideology rooted in the world of politics, where the processes of

patrimonialisation of folkloric creations were related to the construction of the national identity and of the people's collective consciousness within the national state. As Regina Bendix observed: "Heritagisation itself has tradition. Organizations and institutions have been created to legitimize [heritagisation as a cultural practice] and to contribute to turning ever more diversified notions of heritage into a self-understood, habitual aspect of culture" (Bendix 2009: 254). This bicephalous tendency of the Romanian safeguarding culture marked many of the events I have witnessed throughout my research and described in the following paragraphs.

## **2. Patrimonialization of Mummers' Plays in Postsocialist Romania**

In December 2009, when I first came to Heleşteni, there was no stage in the locality for the team of mummers to present their sketches. This simple fact gave a sense of freedom and created the premises of a continuous interaction and communication between mummers and the spectators who became actors in their own turn. In 2010, on my second visit to Heleşteni, an important part of this environment had disappeared. The township hall had erected a stage between the township hall building and the cultural house. The stage was important for organizing many cultural and artistic events in the *comună*, and contributed positively to the local cultural life. But from the point of view of the carnivalesque and burlesque culture of the mummers, the appearance of the stage brought about a series of changes. The local political leaders were no longer required to descend among the mummers and thus to expose themselves to the mummers' carnivalesque plays. They could go out through the back door of the township hall, and in a few seconds they would already be on the stage from where they could control the events of the afternoon of December 31<sup>st</sup>. From there, the mayor or deputy mayor would hold a speech and then introduce to the spectators the teams that were going to carol through the village. Afterwards, the teams would offer an onstage performance and then receive a diploma from the township hall representatives as a sign of gratitude "for the young people's efforts to participate in maintaining local traditions."

For me, the seemingly simple event of building a stage in the village has become a metaphor for the events I was about to witness in the following winters, events that have increased the distance between mummers' plays and the village culture that had created them. If in 2009 the *Deer* and *Goat* teams, as well as the *Pantomimic Mummers*, were caroling only through the village, starting with 2010 I have observed a trend that has grown in the following years: the participation of a large team of mummers representing the Heleşteni

*comună* at winter folklore festivals organized in Iași county. In Heleşteni, it was decided that the band meant to represent them would be the *Dance of the Deer*. But it was not the same team of 6-7 children aged between 8-14 who were roaming through the villages of the *comună*. The newly formed group consisted of 12-18 participants and was composed mainly of 16-30 year olds, veterans of the custom, with a lot of experience but also very resilient to the demands of such festivals.

I observed the same trend in Ruginoasa where, starting with 2009, either the *Malanca* team or *The Dance of the Deer* team from Vascani village began to participate in various festivals in the Moldova region. In this case, too, the *Malanca* team representing Ruginoasa in folklore festivals, was no longer the same as the one I had seen in the village. The large group was rather an eclectic band consisting of: girls in folk costumes who were reciting New Year's carols, *căldărari* and *arnăuți* from the classic *Malanca* team, a pair of professional trombone players and two pairs of fighters wearing masks and long wooden clubs. These fighters were just accompanying the team, without performing any dance or acting piece.

The pressure of joining these festivals grew proportionally to the previous success of the participating teams. Moreover, since 2009 such folklore festivals in the area have begun to grow both in number and intensity. In this context, some new festivals have been set up and the old ones have risen to an unprecedented level. Thus, if in 2010 and 2011 the *Dance of the Deer* team from Heleşteni participated only in the *Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions in Pașcani* city, since 2012 three more festivals have been added to their schedule: *The International Folklore Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions of Iași* city; *The Festival of Customs "Start the Plough, Dear Charming Princes"* of Vatra Dornei city; and the *Alexandru Vasiliu Folklore Festival* from Tătăruși town. Between 2012-2016, other seven festivals were added, hosted by cities not only from Iași, but also from various counties of Romania. The cities of Piatra-Neamț, Buzău, Tulcea, Suceava, Târgu-Frumos, plus the *comune* Liteni, Moldovița and Sucevița - all of which were hosting winter Folklore festivals - welcomed the the *Deer* team from Heleşteni among their participants.

A brief look at the geographical position of these localities shows us that some of them, such as Târgu-Frumos and Pașcani, are just 20 kilometers away from Heleşteni *comună*, while cities like Buzău and Tulcea are situated more than 300 kilometers away. Last but not least, a settlement outside Romania – Cernăuți (Chernivtsi) in Ukraine - was added to the list in 2016. Either way, the trip to these urban centers involved high costs and more



elaborate logistics in order to ensure the participation of a team of 20-22 members in these events. I observed a similar situation in Ruginoasa, too. The team organized by the Ruginoasa township hall has neither missed an edition of the *Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions in Pașcani* city since 2009, nor the *The Festival of Customs "Start the Plough, Dear Charming Princes"* of Vatra Dornei city since 2010.

Of these folklore festivals, the oldest ones - including those of Iași and Hârlău cities - were established during the Communist Era, beginning with 1967. However, most of them were founded after 1995, and after 2009 they began to develop benefiting from the participation of numerous and better organized teams. Moreover, with the multiplication of such festivals, a competitive system between them has been generated. The organizers tried to provide the most attractive accommodation and prizes in order to attract folk teams from the *comune* that were interested in joining these cultural events. The pressure to take part in the events began to increase, too, given the incredible growth of the festivals after 2009. The pressure came from multiple directions: from the county culture committees that were in touch with the mayors of *comune*; from the organizers of the festival who sent invitations to those localities that had organized folklore teams in the past; from the local and national TV stations that produced full broadcasts and shows based on the recordings of the festivals; from local politicians who built symbolic capital through these events; and even from locals who wanted to see on the TV screen their own representatives on the festival stage. In spite of this pressure, bands that were already well-established such as the Heleşteni's *Deer* had an overloaded program at the end of the year; consequently, they had to reject at least few of the offers received and to follow only those considered the most important.

Compared to each other, all the festivals shared common characteristics, but they also had features that distinguished them. The common attribute of all these events was represented by two key elements. The first was the presence of the participating folkloric teams usually consisting of 12-25 members. The second one was the staged winter folk traditions, ranging from carol singers to dancers, mummers' plays, or resulting in a combination of all of them. In terms of morphology and deployment, most festivals proposed two basic elements: the bands' parade on the city streets and the stage performance of these bands according to the order established by the organizers. Although these festivals resembled each other from the point of view of the performance, and generally received the visit of similar bands enacting the same kind of winter traditions' repertory, they were somewhat different in terms of the targets they pursued.

For tourist cities such as Vatra Dornei or county residences like Iași, hosting winter festivals also had the purpose of attracting tourists. From this point of view, the large number of people present on the streets of these cities, the groups flowing from the gates of local hotels immediately after the events started, and especially the numerous cars with plates issued in various other counties of Romania, demonstrated that the purpose had been partially achieved. While this was the case in such localities, in others like Pașcani and Târgu-Frumos, the festivals were smaller, with fewer bands participating, and their purpose seemed to be rather cultural, media-related and political. A ubiquitous fact in particular supported this hypothesis. Local politicians, mayors and deputy mayors would usually take the floor at the opening of these festivals, declaring therein that through these festivals they showed respect and appreciation to their fellow citizens, struggling to offer them an "attractive cultural and educational spectacle". Likewise, every time, at least several local TV stations broadcasted news and even entire reportages on the events.

In addition to these quite obvious goals, after discussions with representatives of County Cultural Centers or cultural referents of several organizing mayoralities, I was able to discover a few other purposes the festivals embodied. According to all these professionals, the main purpose of these festivals was "to educate the public about the ancient traditions of the Romanian people." Last but not least, I heard other voices among the spectators of the events, and even discussions between the members of the participating teams, claiming that through these cultural manifestations "money was being poured from local budgets and sponsorships to the pockets of local elected representatives." This goal could not be ignored and was one more example of the generalized corruption of the postsocialist Romanian society, a phenomenon that hit all sectors of activity, including the cultural one. Whatever the purpose of these festivals, the logistics set in motion for their unfolding, as well as their final outcome were impressive.

### **3. *The Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions in Pașcani* – Authenticity versus Invention of Traditions**

The first such festival I attended following the *Deer* team of Heleşteni, was the second edition of the *Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions in Pașcani* city, on December 30<sup>th</sup> 2010. The explosion of energy and the exuberance emanating from the event fascinated me. Above all, the band parade was exuberant and full of joy. First, the bands arrived at the City Hall one by one, by buses and minibuses. Then, one of the city hall organizers announced

the route of the parade for the participating teams: they would start from the City Hall located uphill on Ștefan cel Mare Street, continue on Moldova Street and, after going down the concrete steep steps connecting the two sides of the city, they would finally reach the lower part of the locality.

Of course, in a matter of moments, the inhabitants of Pașcani turned their gaze immediately to the large group of mummers and carolers colorfully dressed and strangely disguised to embody animals such *deer, bears, rams, horses, roosters* or even the more exotic *llamas, gorillas, lions* and *monsters*. All these *animals* seemed to form eclectic teams with other people dressed in traditional peasant clothes, as well as with *shepherds, animal trainers, officers* and *gypsies*. As they moved forward, these groups of 10-20 people made an incredible noise with their drums, flutes, firecrackers, small trumpets and especially with the iron bells fastened around their waists and rattling continuously while their holders jumped up and down incessantly. Attracted by the deafening noise, by the mummers' jester-like behavior, as well as by their multicolored clothes, people from neighboring apartments went out to the streets or just looked curiously from their balconies or windows. Some of them took pictures, filmed the participants or just recorded the sounds with their phone devices.

This entire crowd was supervised by police and gendarmes who tried to create a protective wall between the crowd of bystanders and the artists parading on the driveways, now close to the traffic. But even the 1-meter distance between the two groups was occasionally taken over by professional cameramen and journalists who worked for local TV stations and studios. They had come equipped with big fancy cameras and tripods, and tried to take professional shots in order to immortalize the entire parade or just to focus sometimes on particular teams or sequences of the entire hurly-burly event.

Shortly after the teams of artists started their long march on the city's main roads, a lot of people poured into the streets, adding more noise to this already crazy hubbub and turmoil. It soon became hard to make your way through the jumble of people and rural artists. In the crowd, it was difficult to find a spot without anybody in. Still, there were few that made an exception, and somebody totally unfamiliar with the entire setting would have probably wondered how this was possible. Actually, the few spots that never had people in were those that demarcated two teams of performers, thus creating a physical and psychological border between the groups. Indeed, there was always a distance of at least two meters between the teams who flowed on the city's roads. Moreover, this distance always

remained constant, telling something important about the relation between the teams and the unfolding event even to an ignorant stranger. This symbolic empty space was double emphasized by the person in front of each team who carried a banner with names like Ruginoasa, Valea Seacă, Miroslovești, Heleșteni, Sirețel, Vânători, Tătăruși, etc, on it. Even for somebody unfamiliar with the setting, it became obvious that, although sometimes with very similar costumes and masks, the teams had their own identity that they wanted to preserve in opposition to other groups joining the parade.

The whole parade - consisting of seventeen bands - lasted almost an hour, delighting the city's residents with an unexpectedly colorful display of costumes and masks. Following this trip, the stream of people – participants and spectators – arrived to the front of a stage set up in the lower part of the city. Soon after, the same host who had talked one hour before in front of the City Hall, told the audience that they would have the chance to attend a folklore festival where many teams from neighboring villages were going to perform their sketches. These announcements gave the spectators useful information about whom the organizers of the festivals were and the name of the localities where the teams came from.

After this brief presentation, the mayor himself went on stage and talked for seven or eight minutes. His speech was very relevant from many points of view. The reason was that it embodied an interesting vision out of which a spectator like me could derive a whole range of information. His discourse did not lack strong accents of local patriotism, and these were interwoven with intentions of safeguarding the local rural traditions. In the end, the city hall administration, the organizers, the spectators and the participating teams were praised for taking part in that festival. In other words, the event had turned into a good opportunity to promote traditions, but also to cultivate the relationship between the mayor and his fellow-citizens, in fact potential voters.

We are doing a special thing today; we would like our traditions to be preserved. And this can only be done in an organized way through such events. In the crazy world we live in, we no longer think of keeping our traditions. But here, in the city of Pașcani, through the new administration of the City Hall, we try to bring winter customs and traditions into the locality, thus making it an important center in the north-western part of Iași county. We have to prove that we make culture here in Pașcani, that in our city there are festivals, shows and caroling concerts... From its small budget, the City Hall tries to offer modest rewards to these folk teams, to stimulate their effort and

cover their travel expenses. They are also going to receive sweet bread - a symbol of winter holidays - but they will specially receive the love and appreciation of the inhabitants of Pașcani... (Mayor Grigore Crăciunescu, speech at the opening of the second edition of the *Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions* in Pașcani city, December 30, 2010).

After this sequence, the host of the event let everybody know that each team was allowed to perform for just 10 minutes. The award would be granted on condition the bands respected this important rule, he added. After that, he told the audience the order of the bands entering the stage. The announcement was soon followed by a brief bustle among the teams. Those who had the chance to be among the first performers expressed their joy sonorously, while the teams who found out they would perform by the end uttered disapproving grunts. Of course, all these reactions were meaningful. The temperature outside was -20 °C. Consequently, the teams scheduled to perform at the end probably knew from their previous experience that this also meant 2-3 hours of waiting outside in the freezing cold.

In the next minutes, the teams were called on stage one by one. As soon as they went on stage, each characters' role became more obvious and it distinguished itself within the team of mummers. The viewers could observe right away that among all the mummers, there were artists who danced and sang, performers who recited carols, teams who played short sketches, and mummers who just played pantomimic jesters for the amusement of the public. Above all, it was an agglutination of a multitude of rural customs and rituals practiced by peasants in the villages of Iași county during the period between Christmas and the New Year. Among these, I managed to identify carols, various mummers' plays, folk dances, nativity plays and *Plugușorul*. Sometimes, everything was performed together by a single large band like Ruginoasa's, which shifted at high speed from the carolers to a sequence of *Malanca* followed by a short dance, something that would never be seen in the local countryside culture where each cultural form had its distinct role and place.

This entire spectacle lasted more than three hours. This was because seventeen teams were participating, each performing for at least 10 minutes. I observed how, at the beginning of the spectacle, the viewers swarmed close to the stage. Nevertheless, even the most enthusiastic of them did not stand before the stage more than approximately thirty minutes. As a result, the rows of spectators, especially those in front of the stage, were continuously rotating, and at the certain moment the people in the back came closer to the stage. After

getting there, they would stay for a while, usually taking a few pictures or briefly filming the stage performance before leaving. In the meantime, some other spectators replaced them. On the balconies of the buildings around, I noticed the same movement. People watched the show for a while, and then went back to the house to warm up a bit probably, only to return later sometimes with a bag of popcorn, a sandwich or a fruit in hand.

The apartment buildings surrounding the stage had been built during communist times and most of the people living inside them were ex-peasants. They had become factory-workers in the industrial plants still operating in Pașcani at full capacity two decades ago. Now, these factories were reduced to a shadow of what they used to be, and many of their workers are retired. They enjoyed watching the teams of peasant artists who probably reminded them of the childhood spent in the villages around Pașcani.

During this second edition of the *Festival of Winter Customs and Traditions* in Pașcani, the *Deer* team from Heleşteni was one of the unlucky bands scheduled at the end of the performance list. Wearing only their red flannels and the blue not very thick pants, *opinci* (*opanak*-like traditional shoes) and cardboard helmets adorned with beads that would not even offer a minimal protection against the cold, the brave performers of Heleşteni were trying to get warm by doing squats and gymnastics movements that did not prove too helpful anyway at such temperatures. The wearer of the *Deer* mask was not well-dressed for winter, so he hid his head in the thick hand-woven blanket on which the deer's fur had been sewn. Watching him hidden like that under the cover, I could only see his frosted eyebrows, and the circles of vapors coming out from under the blanket and condensing above, only to vanish instantly in the cold air of that frosty afternoon.

After more than two hours of waiting in the frost, the team started its performance. But the movements of the performers betrayed the tormenting hours spent in the freezing cold. In addition, the sonic equipment of the stage caused trouble during the performance, with jitter and a temporary loss of sound that once made it impossible for the band members to hear the melody played by the piper at the microphone. Thus, the team was desynchronized and the final performance was a weak one even for the participants themselves. That is why, right after they stepped out of the stage, I heard reproaches, noticed nervous gestures, and witnessed heavy talks by some of the team members against others, all of which were betraying the state of exhaustion they had gone through. It was obvious that everyone had hoped for a prize, and that hope was then lost. Although the sums of money

collected were relatively small, especially since they were divided between so many performers, the prestige of returning to the village in full glory would have probably been the true reward and the real motivation for winning a prize.

As neutral and external observer, I managed to observe a series of elements that had probably gone unnoticed for the members of the *Deer* team. The team now participating for the first time on the stage of a festival was made up of guys who were used to simply caroling through the village without the experience of the spotlight and the rigors imposed by it. During the performances in the village, the show was created mainly by the interaction between the *Deer* and the householders, the *Deer* pranks scaring the young girls, the way it took the householder's money with its mobile maxilla, and then thanked by moving its head, as well as its attempts to escape from the circle created by the bear-leaders around it. Once on stage, all these particularly charming elements disappeared, and what was left of the whole piece was the dance of the bear-leaders around the *Deer*, its death and symbolic resurrection, and the incantation of the *Deer*'s master uttered in the ear of the fallen animal. All these scenes contained nothing spectacular to impress the urban public present there. Moreover, the teams on stage had to present their performance facing the spectators, while in the village, the team was used to play around an imaginary circle created by the bear-leaders around the *Deer* and its master - the *Gypsy king*.

All these elements have proven to be essential for setting up a successful stage performance. This was probably noticed by other participants, too, and especially by the trainers of the participating teams. Some of them were experienced choreographers who knew well what the conditions for achieving a quality stage performance were. In the years to come, traveling by my own to attend several such shows, with or without the *Deer* team of Heleşteni, I had the opportunity to see radical changes of the winter rituals performed by these local choreographers. Some of them had subtly altered the old verses of the *Deer*'s incantation uttered by the master of the *Deer*. This incantation had become just a political pamphlet and a critique of corrupt governments since the 1989 Revolution. In other cases, the *Deer* itself had turned into a simple character within a mixed dancing team that gathered *bears*, *small horses* and *deer* - each of which had been in fact an autonomous rural ritual of the customary communities in the villages of Iași county. Moreover, I have often noticed the choreographers installing themselves professionally just one meter away from the stage, and giving directions to performers during the performance. These and many other recent influences have drastically altered the mummers' plays, turning them into simple stage shows

with an aesthetical and successful public appearance. I observed the whole situation throughout many years, from 2010 to 2017.

That day, on December 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, I was just starting to discover this complex and fascinating world. On the same evening, I had a long discussion about the events in Pașcani and their significance, with Monica Heintz, my colleague and collaborator with whom I completed that stage of the 2010-2011 research. Mr. Hâra, our host, also attended this technical discussion between two anthropologists. Later, at his request, I connected my video camera to the TV so that we could watch the tapes filmed in the morning and afternoon of that day. That was how we were able to observe with more attention the evolution of the Heleşteni's *Deer* team, as well as that of the bands from the *comune* that had been awarded. One of them which attracted our special attention was the team from Miroslovești.

Made up of *bears*, *little horses*, *officers*, *goats*, drummers, and professional fiddlers, this large team presented a dynamic, dance-based performance where the characters alternated in fast-paced sequences lasting a few minutes, where the *bears*, the *little horses* and the *goats* appeared simultaneously. The performance ended with a collective dance of all the band members on a well-known folk melody performed by the professional musicians accompanying the team. Of all the characters of this band, the group of three goats became immediately visible due to their stature that left a mark on the group's image. The costumes of these goats were made of white wool and the necks were two and a half meters long, also dressed up in white. Because of this, the players hidden beneath the wool coil manipulated the heads with a special lever system that required special skills. But the length of the necks made it possible for the players to perform a kind of dance of rotating necks that rather looked like flamingo birds or giraffes than goats in the eyes of the viewers. Despite this, all the arrangements produced a sensational stage effect that was well received by the public and, apparently, by the jury, too.

However, for me, as an anthropologist with rich field experience in rural areas, this image of the goats from the *comună* of Miroslovești, as well as the whole sketch performed, caused great dilemmas and perplexities. Mr. Hâra embraced my opinion, too, and expressed a bit indignantly his ideas about what he had seen:

As mayor, if I sent a team to a festival, it should be the same as the one wandering through the village. I cannot invent anything just for the sake of the stage or to get a prize. I'm going on stage with the same band that's walking throughout the village.



This is what it means to be honest with the public, to present a real sample of your village when you join a folklore festival (Hâra Constantin, 46 years old, Oboroceni village, December 30, 2010, field notes, personal archive).

The statements of the mayor of Heleşteni has strengthened my conviction about the authenticity of certain teams I had seen in Paşcani. All indications led to the same conclusion. These teams were just a laboratory creation of some local choreographers in order to produce a successful stage effect on the audience and a good impression on the jury. Under these circumstances, the leaders of the bands who decided to keep the authentic spirit of the rural world and give a glimpse of this universe to urban viewers became the losers of such folklore competitions. With these ideas in mind, I told my interlocutors, Monica and Constantin, that I wanted to eliminate any doubt about the authenticity of these bands. So I immediately informed them about my decision to go to Miroslaveşti in person to find out what was happening in that locality during winter holidays. The next day, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, we were too busy filming our documentary, but January 1<sup>st</sup> was the last day I could check my hypothesis: to prove whether the “white goats” with their long necks were caroling throughout the village or were just the creation of an ingenious choreographer.

Deciding to land on a new territory and to go to a totally unknown village at the border between Iaşi and Neamţ counties seemed crazy back then when we still had a lot to film for our visual research in Heleşteni and all the gates were open for our research. That's why my colleague Monica exclaimed: "I cannot believe you're doing this! Going that far for this information!" That moment, Mr. Costantin unexpectedly joined my initiative and even gave me a helping hand: "I'll come with you. I know the mayor of Miroslaveşti well, he's a good guy, so we can even talk to him or we can ask him to get us in touch with some people from the *comună*."

Therefore, on the morning of January 1<sup>st</sup>, I went to Miroslaveşti with Mr. Constantin. This *comună* is 40 kilometers away from Heleşteni. To our surprise, without any help, we managed to talk very easily to the people there, and even found few locals who agreed to give me brief interviews. The information gathered from them confirmed our hypothesis. The long neck goats, as well as the bears and the little horses we had seen on the stage of the festival in Paşcani were the creation of two local teachers who prepared the ensemble at the request of the township hall. Subsequently, the same band went to several folklore festivals in the area, but also held a representation for villagers on December 31<sup>st</sup>, in front of the township hall of

Miroslovești. More than that, I learned from some villagers that the *Dance of the Goat* had disappeared for some time from the villages of the *comună*, as there were no young people interested in taking this tradition further. That is why the only show in the category of mummies' plays that the locals could watch was the one organized by the mayor's office on the afternoon of December 31<sup>st</sup>. Besides this, I found out from some older locals that the *Goat* team that had previously walked through the *comună* was a classic one: a wooden head with a mobile mandible, and with the goat's player hidden under a blanket decorated with ribbons and bells. Thus, in Miroslovești, a *comună* located on the national road DN2 connecting Roman and Suceava, two large urban centers of the Moldavian region, the *Dance of the Goat*, a trademark of the mummies' plays, had vanished more than a decade ago.

#### **4. Intangible Cultural Heritage – Festivalization, Urbanization, Mass-Mediatization**

All the dilemmas that I have had at various stages of my research concerning the distinction between village rituals and stage performances, were related not only to the issue of safeguarding, but also to a series of important questions about the process: what aspects of rural culture are being patrimonialized, by whom, by what means and especially how this is done. In this wider discussion, the question of authenticity, was a theme that has been debated by many scholars of mummies' plays, even those who have not approached them from the perspective of heritage studies (see Creed 2011: 57). However, in heritage studies this topic has become a classic one in recent years, with technical discussions on the issue of national identity involved in the process of festivalisation of rural traditions (Cash 2011).

Other issues were related to the external intervention required to safeguard the customs, the genuineness of the cultural product resulting from the safeguarding process, the economic and political stakes surrounding the cultural elements on which *the intangible cultural heritage* label had been placed (Skounti 2009). Last but not least, an apple of discord appeared over the process of safeguarding and the relationship of this process with several forms of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). From this perspective, the question was whether traditions invented or reinvented during the safeguarding process - such as the folklore festivals I had witnessed - could still be considered authentic and genuine, or were they just the fruit of recent interventions that could no longer be included in the category of rural traditions?

Indeed, during my journeys at winter folklore festivals in Moldova region, I have observed how concerned for authenticity the organizers and sometimes even the jury were. At

*The Festival of Customs "Start the Plough, Dear Charming Princes"* in Vatra Dornei city, for instance, each time there was a parade sequence, a group of folk costumed riders and an ox-wagon, or a pair of oxen pulling a plough, were presented. Obviously, the image of the ox-wagon has been associated to the rural world and the authentic Romanian peasant. For example, ox-wagons often appeared as representations of a rural idyllic world in the works of the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian painter Nicolae Grigorescu. Local specialists explained these depictions also by referring to their relationship with the magical thinking of the individual in rural societies, shading an archaic tinge on the elements the festival introduced:

The trumpet and the alphorn accompany the main moments and rituals of the villagers' human life. The New Year's plow furrow drawn around the household has magical and religious connotations. That is where the idea of an ancestral plow furrow comes from. It is the same furrow that, during New Year's Day, surrounds a village, a human settlement or a certain area used by humans, and beyond which people are no longer protected. In the middle of the ancestral furrow the plow adorned with a green fir tree had made, people believed they were protected. Beyond that furrow, things do not happen the same way (Minorica Dranca, the director of Ethnographic Museum of Vatra Dornei city, [www.monitorulsv.ro](http://www.monitorulsv.ro)).

Many of the participating bands and the choreographers preparing them put a special emphasis on the folk costumes dancers wore and on mummers' masks. From this perspective, the old homemade costumes woven at the loom were in great demand and much appreciated. So were the bear costumes made of reed flowers. I heard various comments about these ones not only made by the organizers, but also by various blogs related to the festivals. At a certain point, several such comments attracted my attention due to the ideology they embraced, as in the following example: "The bear reed costumes were reminiscent of a cult worshipping an agrarian god, a cult lost long ago" or "A relic from the prehistoric times of agrarian civilizations. The bear was considered the incarnation of a god, due to the power and intelligence it possessed" (<https://harlauletnografie.wordpress.com/tag/ursul>). Instead, the Halloween rubber masks worn by some characters in the *Dance of the Goat* or the *Dance of the Deer* were regarded as recent insertions, unrelated to the genuine rural world.

Unfortunately, in most cases, all of these commentators and "builders of rural authenticity" had not conducted any field research in the countryside; on the contrary, they were heavily influenced by the representations of the romantic nationalism implemented

through the Ceaușescu's festivals during the last two decades of communist dictatorship. The way the vision of these people - some of them highly influential or even members of juries - influenced the morphology and the development of these festivals was another interesting issue worth studying closely. In any case, once again, the vision I had based on hard fieldwork in the Moldovan villages, and the vision stemmed from a romantic nationalist perspective, did not coincide at all. For example, the young people who had worked for days to create the reed flower costume for their *Bear* in Bădeni village, Sticlaria *comună*, told me on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, while I was joining their *Bear* team through the village for several hours, that in the years of communism, a law severely limiting the access of individuals to hunting weapons, and also drastically limiting hunting as hobby, had been issued. Under these conditions, for a while there was nothing to replace the bear fur used that far to create costumes, and a compromise solution was proposed: that of creating them out of reed flowers. Following the same line, Halloween masks embodying monsters, gorillas, demons, etc., were used extensively in *comune* like Heleșteni and Strunga that still kept the most vibrant and dynamic rural culture in the region of Moldova.

All in all, after years of field research in the county of Iași, and in the light of my research on mummers' play, the problem of rural rituals' authenticity could be cut very simply from my perspective. The entire culture of festivals, rooted in the history of communist dictatorship, was a safeguarding fiasco. The mummers' play and the other rituals exported on the stages of dozens of folklore festivals that had flourished not only in Moldova, but also throughout the country, had nothing authentic in most cases. Instead, the rituals of rural customary communities were authentic because the producers and the consumers of the entertainment were the same, all of them active members of rural culture. These rituals were ways of solving the problems of the village, expressions of the social networks created in the world of villages by the peasants themselves, ways for people to relate to each other, means of transcending temporarily the daily burdensome realities and, last but not least, "story (s) people tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1972: 26). These festivals not only made it impossible to preserve parts of the customary community culture, but also turned it into another stream, eroding the foundation of a rural culture that was still alive, yet moribund, in the county of Iași. This was accomplished through three processes: *festivalization*, *urbanization* and *mass-mediating*.

The three cumulative processes led to the peasants' alienation from their own culture and rituals, as the increasingly predominant medium of relating to them became the TV

broadcast, a different environment compared to the face-to-face interaction that mediated the creation of human relationship in the past. I started to understand this from one of my interviews with a 63-year-old lady from Oboroceni village. In April 2012, I inquired the elderly lady if she had been visited by the *Deer* team the winter before. She lived in a remote area of Oboroceni village that - I had learned from the head of a team - the *Deer* bands had little motivation to visit. Houses were far from the main roads and mainly populated by elders who gave little money to the artists or do not receive the mummings' bands at all. The answer of the elderly lady was quite astonishing: "Usually the *Deer* teams don't come to our house. They are not so interested in caroling two old ladies (she and her mother). But I saw on TV our *Deer* team performing at the festival in Pașcani and I enjoyed it a lot" (Voicu Cornelia, Oboroceni village, April 29, 2012, Interview). Thus, especially for poor people and elders, the heritagisation activities and their broadcasting through local TV stations became the new medium through which they remained in contact with their own heritage.

In addition, the investment of human effort and capital to prepare the team that participated in the festivals was sometimes detrimental to rural culture. Villages with a declining population such as Oboroceni felt it very acutely and, to my surprise, the phenomenon had been observed even by the vigilant eye of villagers. This came out in one of the last interviews I had conducted in the winter of 2014, right before leaving the area after an intensive field research. The interviewee was Mitică, a well-known mask maker in his village and a father of two little boys. His sons were both members of the *Deer* team the mayor had selected to represent the village at the folklore festivals held in different cities from Moldova region. In spite of this, Mitică raised a critical voice against folklore festivals:

I had an argument with the cultural representative of the mayoralty. I told him: «How is this possible? We send our *Deer* to the folklore festivals in cities for city-dwellers to see it, and people in our village don't have any chance to watch the team performing in their village?» But he replied to me, «We have no choice! We have to send our *Deer* to the local folklore festivals!» Then I got angry and I talked to a neighbor who worked in Italy throughout the year. I asked him to help me make our *Deer* team in the village. This is because here in our village there is a local pride to have your own *Deer* that comes to your house to play in front of you - the householder. Finally, I made a team with my neighbor, my children, plus two more boys from the village. With this *Deer* team, I was able to go through our village at

least to a few houses and in front of the village hall on December 31<sup>st</sup> (Mitica Alexa, 32 years old, Oboroceni village, January 3, 2015, Interview).

Paradoxically, the safeguarding processes that should have stimulated the village communities to preserve their rural customs, eventually contributed, just like many other forces of modernity, to raising of the mummers' play funerary stone. At the same time, several village communities still practiced their winter rituals, despite the pressures of modern society and without any safeguarding policies. Anyway, through these three processes - *festivalization, urbanization and mass-mediatization* - mummers' plays were exported to the urban world, one that was more anchored in the realities of the modern world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and endowed with more financial and institutional resources than the impoverished and aged Romanian villages. Just like the people who migrated to a better world, rural traditions took the road to cities that proved to be a powerful magnet against which any resistance was almost impossible. Besides these processes that accompanied the culture of festivalization, in my fieldwork I managed to identify other influences coming from the modern society, which marked the rural culture and mummers plays. One of the events that strengthened my conviction that peasant culture and its values are under siege took place on the same day I met Mr. Gheorghică Chelaru.

## **5. From Mummers' Plays to Video Games**

On the same afternoon of January 1, 2015, my hosts in Oboroceni received the visit of several families besides Chelaru family. One of these was that of Nicoleta and Mihai Cosma and their children, Ștefan, a ten years old boy, and Ioana, a seven years old girl. Back then, they lived in Bacău, one of the most developed urban centers in Moldova region. Mihai was the younger brother of Mrs. Doina, my host. From the family's discussions, I learned that among the six children of the Cosma family, Mihai had been the most diligent at school. Thus, after finishing an elite high-school and the College of Economics in Iași city, he started to work in the banking sector and, after several promotions, became bank inspector. His wife Nicoleta also worked in the financial field as accountant. In other words, they were the kind of family their acquaintances regarded as successful, and that had an excellent financial situation, a rarity in the troubled and uncertain postsocialist world. However, instead of spending their winter holiday in a foreign country at a luxury resort, Mihai's family spent their vacation in Oboroceni village every year, waiting for the mummers' visit. However, I

noticed that the two kids, Ștefan and Ioana, were less fascinated by mummies than by their last generation Mac tablet with many video games installed on.

Shortly after being invited inside the house, the guests took a seat at the table of my hosts and started chatting in front of a glass of wine. But, just half an hour later, another family, this time from the same village, came to visit the Hâra family' home. They were Roxana and Mitică Alexa, the godchildren of the Hâra family. They were also accompanied by their two sons: Robert, seven years old, and Andrei, four years old. The two children had become the undisputed celebrities of the Deer team who had participated in several folklore festivals during the previous two years. Their age and especially their stage performance as masters of the Deer, reciting the incantation in the animal's ear, probably contributed to the success of the Heleşteni band that had thus won several awards at these festivals. This was a reason of great local pride. Perhaps that was why the mayor, as host, immediately introduced the two children and their parents to the other guests. In the following moments, the two children were asked to interpret the incantation of the Deer for the present guests. Mitică seemed to have foreseen the situation, so the two children had come with their bear-leader drums. The subsequent representation was full of liveliness and exuberance, managing to cheer up the atmosphere. The scene was completed by a series of wishes and carols recited by Robert, the older one, already considered a master of the local winter traditions.

The wonderful recital performed by the two members of the Deer team cheered the atmosphere. The two boys' sketch won many applauses and praises. Finally, some of the guests even offered money to these two veritable tradition promoters. But I observed how the entire scene made the two children of the Cosma family watch the performance with envy. The children of the Cosma family had their own merits: Ștefan was a national champion in swimming and Ioana had good results in school, but these talents could neither compete with the skills of the Deer "masters", nor be appreciated within the caroling and mumming atmosphere of the Heleşteni's Winter Holidays. However, these moments did not last more than 20 minutes, after which the whole group of children retreated to the room nearby. About half an hour after the recital, I saw them interacting with each other. Ștefan seemed to have introduced Robert to his iPad's secrets. And Robert, who had never seen a tablet before, was so fascinated that at one point he laid his head on Ștefan's chest so that he would not lose any "event" on the iPad's display. There were video games and other apps that Robert had never seen before. Thus, in just two hours, Robert had learned some of the tablet's secrets, and

continued to ask Ștefan many questions about other functions and icons he did not understand.

However, the time had come for the family to go home. Robert's parents had already taken their clothes, and the departure was about to happen in a few minutes. Realizing that this departure meant separating from the iPad, Robert seemed very disappointed, and I think I even spotted a sense of despair on his face. Right away, I saw him going to the next room and coming back with his drum in hand. He immediately approached Ștefan and, without a word, gave him the drum. At the same time, he looked at the tablet, probably hoping he would get it in exchange for his bear-leader drum. The scene impressed me deeply. The main reason for my emotion was that what I saw in the scene was not only a village child's hope to get an extraordinary object. In his hope, I had sensed all the aspirations of the village emigrants giving their rural world away for the brightness and fascination exerted by the lights of a modern urbanized society. Last but not least, I could thus catch a glimpse of the entire history of mummers' play in the last decades, and of their transformation from community rituals to simple representations inside the cyber-space and among television images.

#### **D. From Community Rituals to Transnational Intangible Cultural Heritage**

##### **1. A Short History of Bucovina's Mummers' Plays: Ethnic Identity, Repressions and Political Influences**

When I started my first day of field research in the winter of 2009, on the streets of Bucharest, I would not have imagined, even for a moment, that my research would end on the streets of another big city, this time in a foreign country. Back then, I was thinking that my study would be one about the cultural heritage of the peasants, and that meant one strictly related to the geography and history of their own localities where winter rituals were part of a complex social network. My vision of the peasants' cultural heritage had been influenced not only by Romanian Folkloristics, but also by some of the classics of anthropological literature about peasants such as Eric Wolf, Oscar E. Handlin, and Paul Stirling.

Handlin, for example, defined the regular peasant as a person who "temporarily mixes his sweat with the soil" (Handlin 1967: 456), while the peasant community's social life gravitates around the narrow borders of the village and the firm rules imposed by the clan's network: "within the village, every family had its place, and in the family - every individual" (Handlin 1967). From a similar view, Wolf saw the peasants' ceremonies as a means of validating a social and moral order only wider than the familiar household, and in which the



hostilities were "contained and constrained" (Wolf 1966: 97). Stirling, too, stated that peasants "have little to do with these people who control their existence, and see only a tiny proportion of them" (Stirling 1965: 266). From all these perspectives, the cultural heritage of the peasants was intimately linked to a territory, a locality, and the community that occupied it.

Moreover, my fieldwork in a relatively isolated community such as Heleşteni, but also in other villages nearby such as Cucuteni and Sticlăria, confirmed my conviction that the cultural heritage of the peasants, as well as their system of values were formed in a cultural micro-ecosystem. But the same research has shown me that, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even in the most isolated rural areas, the new peasantry (Ploeg 2009) is no longer the same as the old one whose only economic resource was only the land. This fact could be noticed from the perspective of the decline of the peasants' system of values that also talks about the radical transformations of the peasants' cultural heritage. Just as peasants migrating in search of a better world, their rituals also follow the way to urban centers, but sometimes also to foreign countries. The most eloquent case in this regard was the team of *The Deer from Heleşteni*. In 2016, this team crossed not only the borders of the native village, but also those of its country, in order to join an international folklore festival.

In January 2017, I did not resist the temptation of accompanying the members of this team during their international trip to the city of Cernăuți (Chernivtsi) in Ukraine. But in making this move, I was aware that, in order to understand the dynamics, symbols and morphology of this festival organized in a foreign country, I had to have at least a succinct picture of the rural culture in the district of Cernăuți. This was the area where most of the groups participating in the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca in Cernăuți* came from.

My friend Florin from Heleşteni *comună*, who had in the meantime become cultural referent of the town hall in this locality, was now the leader of the *Deer* team and one of the organizers of the trip. The festival was scheduled for the afternoon of January 15, 2017. But I arrived in Heleşteni ten days before the date. After just a few hours of rest, I left to Cernăuți together with Florin and with his personal car. My intention was to understand the social, economic, political and cultural environment of the New Year's customs in the rural area south of Cernăuți. This area was a peak of cultural effervescence and verve in the practice of rural rituals such as *Malanca*, *The Dance of Goat* and *The Small Horses* around the New

Year's Day. As in the whole of Ukraine, and in the area we were about to visit, the New Year was celebrated by the old calendar, also known as the Julian calendar. According to this, the New Year was celebrated on January the 14<sup>th</sup>. From the point of view of the Romanian teams participating in the festival in Cernăuți, the advantage this calendar - different from the one used in Romania - offered was a few more days of rest for the teams of rural artists, right after the madness of the New Year celebrations. This is because in Romania the New Year was celebrated on January 1<sup>st</sup>, according to the Gregorian calendar, which resulted in a difference of 14 days between the New Year in Romania and that in Ukraine.

By the end of 2016 and the first days of 2017, Florin had already participated, both as a member of the group and as an organizer of the *Deer* team in Heleşteni, at four major folklore festivals in Romania, plus the dense events related to this period in Hărmăneasa, the village he was living in now. Therefore, by the end of the first week of 2017, he had not yet fully recovered from the fatigue and agitation of the winter holidays. Nevertheless, my proposal to take a look at the rural area in southern Cernăuți proved to be irresistible for the fresh graduate of the Master of Patrimony and Cultural Tourism at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași.

Together, we made a tour of the villages of Carapciu (Karapchiv)<sup>53</sup>, Proșița (Prosika), Pătrăuții de Sus (Petrivtsi), Suceveni (Sucheveny) and Crasna (Krasnoil's'k). In an overwhelming proportion, these villages were composed of a Romanian ethnic population. The contact with the people in these villages was much quicker and easier than we had anticipated. For two years, Heleşteni *comună* had had solid cultural relations with the *Bucovina Art Center for Conservation and Promotion of the Traditional Romanian Culture* in Cernăuți, through which several artists gave recitals on the stage in Heleşteni. One of them was the folk music singer and music teacher Gheorghe Stratulat. With his help, we were able to enter in a relatively easy way into the cultural universe of these villages.

More than in other rural localities where I had conducted field research in Romania, for the villagers in southern Ukraine, their winter rituals were regarded as a mark of ethnic identity. This Romanian ethnic population has often been under the vicissitudes of history, subjected to massacres, persecutions by the Stalinist dictatorship, then faced with deportations to the Gulag during the Soviet Union (Mihailiuc 2004). For them, practicing and

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<sup>53</sup> I have transcribed here both the Ukrainian name and the Romanian one of certain localities. From now on, I am going to use only the Romanian name of the respective localities.

transmitting winter rituals such as *Malanca*, *The Dance of the Goat* and *The Small Horses* was not only a winter tradition, but also a guarantor of maintaining their own ethnic identity in a foreign country that often promoted a hostile policy against ethnic minorities. Perhaps for this reason, too, performing such winter rituals was also a duty to "ancestors who had suffered under the Soviet rule." In this socio-political disturbing context, the most exciting challenge was to find out how these political and historical causes had influenced Mummers' Plays, but especially the morphology and symbolism of the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca in Cernăuți*.

From this perspective, the information collected from the five visited villages and their comparison with the collected data from the villages of Iași county were revealing. Unlike Romania where the communist dictatorship was somewhat more tolerant to these local traditions, the performers of winter rituals in the southern Ukraine have been persecuted for years for performing these rituals. Dragos Tochiță from Pătrăuți de Sus remembered that in 1959, during the time of Nikita Khrushchev, the members of a whole *Malanca* team from his village, including himself, were arrested by the Soviet militia, taken to Strojineți (Storozhynets) to the *State Security Committee*, held two days under arrest in the basement of the building that hosted the militia, and investigated by members of the Soviet security under the accusation of "disturbing the public peace". After this incident, the *Malanca* teams formed in the following years caroled quietly, without using trumpets and music, avoiding the main streets and village centers (Dragoș Tochiță, 80 years old, Pătrăuții de Sus village January 11, 2017, Interview). Just as in Romania, *The State Security* resorted, through the local administration, to the issue of official certificates for all the teams who caroled throughout the villages during winter holidays. Through such certificates, the activity of the teams was easier to control, and the possible "irregularities" that occurred during the events were easier to identify. Until the late 1960s, the militia's actions were more brutal. Nevertheless, after 1970 "the militia representatives only watched these practices silently, but they were just impatiently waiting to find a reason - even a minor one - such as the breaking of a fence during the rituals, to punish harshly by means of high fines the members of the *Malanca*, or *The Dance of Goat*" (Gheorghe Stratulat, 58 years old, Carapciu comună, January 13, 2017, Interview).

Similarly to the situation in Heleșteni - a *comună* located on the front line between 1942-1944 -, after the Second World War the young people from the villages of southern Ukraine started to wear officers' uniforms, abandoning the traditional woolen coat decorated

with folk symbols (Vasile Cozaciuc, 58 years old, Carapeiu comună, January 13, 2017, Interview). The Soviet officers' uniforms are still being used by young *Malanca* performers even today. And, just as in Heleşteni, the young people's participation in *Malanca* marks a new stage in their life. The only people who were allowed by the village community to take part in *Malanca* were those boys who had returned from the army and were about to start a family. Probably this was the reason why the team of the young men first went to the house where the sweetheart of the *calfă*<sup>54</sup> (*Malanca*'s leader) lived. Afterwards, the teams went to the girlfriends of the other boys in the team and only then they caroled at other households. A *Malanca* team gathers not only the 4-6 *officers*, but also *bears, goats, old men, old women, Jews, Gypsies, demons*, and even a character who embodies *death*. The performances are similar to many other forms of folk theater, including sketches ironizing various social aspects considered negative in the village, such as avarice, greed, laziness and, last but not least, the close cooperation between certain villagers and Soviet authorities. *Death* was also ironized and treated as an insignificant event that should be overlooked.

After Mikhail Gorbachev's election as leader of the Soviet Union, and the implementation of his perestroika and glasnost policy, the political climate became much more relaxed than in previous years. All these political changes were reflected in the characters and sketches of the *Malanca*. Sneaky characters such as *Gorbachev* and the Romanian dictator *Nicolae Ceaușescu* were included among the characters of the *Malanca* teams, ridiculing the flaws of the two political leaders.

This was an act of great courage for the organizers of the *Malanca* teams mainly because, despite Gorbachev's perestroika, the Soviet Union was still a totalitarian state. During the same time, by the end of the 1980s, Romania was going through a terrible period when such an event could have resulted in arrests. But at that moment the Soviet Union was more democratic than Romania. During the time of perestroika, too, the *malancarii* (the members of the *Malanca* team) began to disguise themselves in Romanian or Russian border control officers, and to create barriers that stopped the cars riding on the roads of those villages. But such acts were only formal, and those

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<sup>54</sup> *Calfa* - a word nowadays considered to be an archaism in Romanian language. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, *calfă* designates, "in the feudal system and in the small craft field of the early capitalism, a worker who received a qualification in a trade or handicraft after the end of the apprenticeship period, and was obliged to work for a while for his employer in exchange of a small payment". The connotations of the term came to confirm my hypothesis that *Malanca* in northern Bukovina, southern Ukraine, was a rite of passage that young boys in the village had to go through to become "real men".

performing them had no other purpose than to stir the laughter of passers by (Gheorghe Stratulat, 58 years old, Carapciu comună, January 13, 2017, Interview).

However, along with democracy, the declaration of independence of the Ukrainian state, and especially after the conflict between the separatists in the Dombaz region - backed and sponsored by the Russian army -, the mummies disguised as border control officers changed their look to *demon guards* wearing camouflage uniforms and hoods. We were able to find out this when, after entering the villages of Carapciu, Prosița, Pătrăuți and Suceveni, decided to descend in the *comună* of Crasna (Krasnoyilsk), the southernmost, and also the most famous locality because of the verve and effervescence of its celebration of the *Malanca* ritual during the New Year's days. We got to Crasna only on January 10, 2017 when the preparations for the *Malanca* were already in full swing. On the evening of the same day, when returning to Cernăuți where we had rented a small apartment to live in during the research, we saw how groups of young people were preparing barriers. This happened not only at the entrance to Crasna, but also in Prosița, Pătrăuții de Sus and Suceveni. I later learned that such barriers were also being prepared at the entrance to larger localities like Storojineți, so that the road to Cernăuți was blocked on both possible routes.

The border-control mummies, once joyful and prankish during Gorbachev's perestroika, had now turned into tough soldiers, frightening and well-fed by alcohol vapors, demanding an entrance fee for the *Malanca* ceremonies to all cars passing through. If the money had gone to the pockets of those investing time and financial resources to make the *Malanca* costumes, we would have been delighted to contribute. However, as I later learned from the organizers themselves, these young people were just sly, bad guys who used the occasion of the New Year celebration and the accompanying rituals to collect some Ukrainian hryvnia that they later invested into cheap alcohol allowing them to be drunk the few days before and during the New Year. I also learned from local sources that it was arguing too much with such recalcitrant groups was no good. Some of these young men had come from the Dombas front and could even be armed. A year before, there had even been a more serious incident involving a Romanian citizen from the city of Brașov, who had opposed the payment of the tax and finally got his hand hit by a knife.

In this situation, the only solution for us as researchers was to negotiate seriously with these "fake border-control officers" and "fake policemen", and to pose as "poor Romanian students in the field of folklore who came to Ukraine to conduct a study about *Malanca* at the

request of their professors." With this story, we managed to cross the few barriers with only 20 hryvnia (\$0.75) per barrier. So, with a maximum of \$4, but charged nonetheless with negative energies following the prolonged negotiations, we managed to get to Crasna in the days before the New Year. A deeper reflection on the behavior and actions of the mummers disguised as border control officers and policemen, with their personal cars wearing the symbols of the Ukrainian police, led me to a more elaborate conclusion. The weak and wretched post-Soviet Ukrainian state, facing an open conflict at the eastern border, did not dare to risk too incisive actions in its southern region where the majority of the population was Romanian. That is why, despite numerous complaints, these "tax-collecting mummers" fiery and marauding, managed to perform their "number" by the end of the year, without being bothered by anyone, and to invent, in their own words, "a new tradition that must be respected." All in all, these mummers were also an expression of a country torn by war, as well as of the generalized corruption and economic decay in which laws and the rule of law were just a soap opera recited by politicians during the electoral campaign.

## **2. Crasna's Malanca: Resistance Against Official Trends and Discourses. Community Mummers' Play as Marks of Authenticity**

After these adventures, we reached Crasna where the laboriousness and intensity of the preparations for *Malanca* and, later, the picturesqueness of the custom made us forget all about the previous problems. At the same time, these elaborate preparations were also astounding for a researcher. This happened because the volume of information gathered in a very short time was enormous and explanations about the preparative were missing almost entirely, the youngsters involved in making the costumes not having enough time and the disposition to discuss the processes. All this made me think that I would leave Crasna with a puzzle of representations, but without a comprehensive image that would make me understand the grandeur of the ritual. This time, too, luck and chance were on our side. In Crasna, fortune made us meet the cultural representative of the Mayor's Office, Olga Bruja Avdochimova. This respectable lady who was also a well-known folk music singer devoted to her village "local traditions", did everything possible so that we, as researchers, could have the gates of the *malancari* - then working to make the costumes - opened. Later on, she also offered us the hospitality of her own home and, above all, her own vision of *Malanca* in Crasna *comună*.

On January 11, together with Olga's son, a 25-year-old guy called Victor, and one of the veterans of the *Malanca* in his village, I managed to enter the courtyard of Nicolae Pleșca. The final touches on bears' sedge suits were being done. Later I was invited to Nicolae's house where for an hour I had a passionate conversation that made me understand the whole range of experiences during this custom. The discussion was a real revelation to me. Much more than in the Romanian villages where I had conducted field research, I noticed in Crasna how locals made a clear distinction between the village *Malanca* and the festivalized *Malanca*, between the rural universe full of vitality and the emphatic stance of the folklore festivals in cities like Cernăuți. The resistance to the official discourse and the attempts of exporting the village *Malanca* beyond the borders of the village community that had created it, were the basic themes of the discussion that followed (for a similar observation, this time in a Balinese context, see (Byrne 2009).

The one who opened the discussion was our host, Nicolae:

The *Malanca* that is held here between the boundaries of the *comună* gives you an energy and an inexplicable force to do things that would otherwise be impossible to achieve, such as wearing a straw suit weighing 40-60 kilograms for hours during the entire ritual. The *Malanca* that had been sent to the urban folklore festivals cannot give you that strength. Because once it is out of the village, *Malanca* is no longer a real *Malanca*. It is a kind of uprooting (Nicolae Pleșca, 28 years old, Crasna comună, January 11, 2017, Interview).

Taking on the same, idea Mrs. Olga nuanced it:

Even if some of the villagers participate during these days at various folklore festivals in Romania or in Cernăuți, the atmosphere that is being created in the village during the days of the *Malanca* ritual cannot be reproduced anywhere else. That is why those who want to see the real *Malanca* have to come here. Only when seeing the *Malanca* here in the village, one can understand the difference. It's about producing such strong feelings that you cannot even compare them to the erotic ecstasy of making love or to a woman's feeling when embracing her baby right after birth... It's a unique thing that happens only here in the village and not at the folklore festivals held in the cities. These folklore festivals will never be able to reproduce the unique village atmosphere. When the "bears" of the *Malanca* team begin to utter that prolonged cry at the beginning of the ritual... there is something ancestral about it. It is all about the

pains and passions that the individual and the community had gathered inside them throughout a year, but also over many generations... That is why they belong and will always belong to this village community (Olga Bruja Avdochimova, 45 years old, Crasna comună, January 11, 2017, Interview).

At this point in the discussion, Victor also spoke:

At “Cernăuți *Malanca*-Fest”, there is nothing but a carnival. There come the bands from all Cernăuți regions and even from outside Ukraine. They make some kind of platforms on cars and try to present their customs to the public. This is not even a *Malanca*. This ritual does not have the same power, as it cannot convey the same feelings... Here in Crasna on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January, the whole village rustles. But these blooming and emanating energies are lost when *Malanca* reaches the streets of Cernăuți. And those who came here to the village and were loaded with this energy on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January, always longed to return (Victor Avdochimov, 25 years old, Crasna comună, January 11, 2017, Interview).

After this discussion, I filmed the already finished sedge bear costumes in Nicolae's barn, and then headed to the workshop of a well-known local mask-maker, in fact a 28-year-old man named Gheorghe. After filming his workshop and part of the manufacturing process, we started talking about the *Malanca* ritual. Although with only eight primary classes graduated, Gheorghe's vision of *Malanca* in Crasna seemed to have something taken out of philosophy books, and gave me the feeling that despite the hundreds of hours of interviews I had had, this was the most vibrant, more passionate and more relevant one. This is especially because, in the end, I got an understanding of *Mummers Plays* that was deeper and more comprehensive than ever before:

Here in the village, the *Malanca* is a kind of energy that you start to feel when the first snow falls. It is a kind of bridge between the generations of the past and the generations that live in the present. When we perform *Malanca*, we also revive those members of the community who practiced *Malanca* in the past by the characters we play during those two days of January. And, I have to say *Malanca* in our village will resist and perpetuate only as long as it is not commercialized. Because the ritual that takes place in Chernivtsi, even if it is presented on the stage by our boys in the village, is just an imitation of an original that cannot be reproduced anywhere else,



except in the village and during those two first days of the New Year. This type of urbanized *Malanca* that some people try to create will never be able to re-create what is happening here in the village. This type of touring *Malanca* also means a kind of destruction of it and, at the same time, a confiscation of Crasna's *Malanca*. The knowledge and customs that have passed from generations to generations are altered for the sake of the tourists and the spectacle that festivals like the ones in Cernăuți were trying to create (Gheorghe Gherman, 28 years old, Crasna comună, January 11, 2017, Interview).

In Gheorghe's view, the *Malanca* performed between the boundaries of the village was a link between past and present generations, a link that could only be achieved by and through the community. Thus all the dead *malacari* lived a sort of new life through the energy that the whole ritual emanated and, through the processes put into play. The rituals performed have the role of linking the past and present of the community, thus cementing the village community by creating milestones on its collective memory:

We, who are alive, are just a link in this chain. And when I say chain I mean that every individual who joined the *Malanca* is part of a long row that goes far back in time and continues beyond the physical death of the individuals composing it. That particular chain is represented by the old people, the ancestors and all those who have ever joined this ritual and have somehow contributed to its continuation. But in fact the main idea is that all the *malancari* (eng. the ones performing the *Malanca*) are reborn, even the ones dead long ago and whose crosses and tombs are now vanished from the *comună's* cemeteries. But we, being still alive, we are able to revive them by preserving this custom. And one can feel that. For instance, when I put my mask on, I become the character that so many *malancari* have performed before me, and I become them. My identity as person vanishes behind the mask and what is left is a character who comes from the community's history and who has been embodied by hundreds and thousands of *malancari* before me. Therefore, as a physical person performing a character in the *Malanca*, you no longer feel the pain, the cold or the fatigue during this ritual. You are going to feel all that once the custom is over, after a few days, but not during the *Malanca*. For, as long as you are behind this mask, you represent a sort of revival of all the *malancari* before you who had performed that character. That is in fact the essence of the *Malanca*. And this essence goes beyond the death and the life experienced by a physical body. Because, when my physical

body will be dead, I am going to live on through the character I had performed and the live *malancari* who perform the *Malanca* after me. That is why *Malanca* is like a sort of bridge that opens only for a few days when the dead and the living get together. So this is exactly the chain with its links that I've talked about in the beginning"

(Gheorghe Gherman, 28 years old, Crasna comună, January 11, 2017, Interview).

Gheorghe's vision has brought to my mind a long-standing debate in current heritage studies. Certain authors even spoke of the so-called "authentic illusion," the victim of which sometimes even fell upon "heritage agents" who "are convinced that these elements are 'authentic', faithful manifestations of what they have always been, timelessly. But this is only an 'authentic illusion'. The belief in the 'authenticity' of the intangible cultural heritage element, its anchoring into a past beyond memory and its immutability justify and reinforce the engagement and activity of heritage agents" (Skounti 2009: 77). Researchers in heritage studies that promoted this charming and misleading perspective generally issued the argument that the touristicization and commercialization of intangible cultural heritage forms were in fact only a sum of processes that were part of the "natural" evolution of these cultural forms. This dynamic should include their re-creation and eventually their complete transformation into something new, in line with the challenges of the present, something that was totally different from the cultural forms that the community had in the past, and which had now lost their previous function. And all these were part of a "natural" and "matter-of-course" process.

Generally, practitioners of intangible heritage were less educated people than researchers trying to impose this misleading vision, so even if they were thinking otherwise they could not impose their vision against such perspectives. However, Gheorghe's argument seemed decisive and unbeatable in this regard. This was because he and my other Crasna interlocutors had observed lucidly how the touristicization, festivalization and urbanization of *Malanca* were in fact not the dynamics and transformation of the custom through and by the community, but a mutation attempting to confiscate it by people with power from the high spheres of the political and economic power. Moreover, by touring and exporting *Malanca* out of the village, the community was depleted of a complex and privileged form of communication between all its members, involving a set of community life experiences that have always outlined landmarks in the collective memory of the community. All these together represented the authenticity existing in the practice of the ritual unfolding between the boundaries of the community. The interventions of my interlocutors made me more

curious about the performance of this complex ritual in Crasna, but also about its pendant - the *Malanca Festival in Cernăuți*.

### **3. Mass-mediatization as Exoticization of Mummers' Plays versus Community Rituals**

January 13 was a full day. After stopping in Carapciu *comună* for an interview, we went back to Crasna where we filmed the arrival of the *malancari* in the *calfă*'s yard. Right there, I met several groups of Ukrainian journalists who had come to make TV reportages about Crasna's *Malanca*. In recent years, *Malanca* of Crasna could not avoid the curious intrusions of Ukrainian reporters coming consistently on-site. I exchanged few words with some of them and I managed to find out what televisions they were working for. There were at least four groups of journalists there, two from Kiev national televisions and two from local television stations in Cernăuți. However, I found out that the bulk of the television teams would arrive in Crasna only the day after, when the parade of *Malanca* teams from all villages of the *comună* to the central square of it would take place.

The presence and actions of these groups of reporters, intervening through local politicians to be allowed to shoot in the courtyards of the *malancari* involved in the last preparations, created the impression of an intrusion that hindered the entire cultural process of setting up a community custom. My immediate perception was that of exoticizing certain aspects of the rural world that were extracted semi-illicitly from the courtyards of the villagers and hurriedly teleported by more or less successful reports on TV screens. The image of a large group of reporters shooting from all angles the embarrassed costume makers, immediately brought to my mind Dennis O'Rourke's documentary *Cannibals Tours*. The main idea of the documentary was that tourists from Western countries had become the cannibals of an exotic culture, carrying with them many photos, videos and artifacts from the villages on the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. They did all this without really knowing their profound meaning and their real significance given by natives. As soon as these images came to my mind, I realized that our presence there had become superfluous. So we immediately left the place and went to Mrs. Olga's house. The day before, she had anyway renewed the invitation to return to her home.

When we got there, we found out that Mrs. Olga had been summoned to the township hall to solve an urgent problem. We were received by Victor, his younger sister Maria Augusta and Mrs. Olga's mother, Mrs. Maria. Shortly after arriving to their house, we realized that even there we had failed to escape the reporters. Two young journalists at a

radio station in Kiev had persuaded Victor to let them film the latest preparations of the mask that was to be carried during the ritual. After they left, we had the opportunity to see the family's welcoming of few small groups of children carolers. The *Malanca* ritual was about to start that night. But I was already feeling how that hasten and community buzz grew with the approach of the event itself. My only frustration was that we would soon have to leave Crasna and I would not be able to have a comprehensive view of the *Malanca* that seemed to be indeed one of the most complex rural rituals I had ever witnessed. I did not know yet this was about to change soon.

In a few minutes, Mrs. Olga had returned from the township hall, very irritated and tuned against her hierarchical superiors - the local politicians. They had given her the task of producing a two-page synthetic paper describing all the stages and the entire course of Crasna's *Malanca*. The document was to be read during the following afternoon at the microphone in a neighboring city's public square where an important cultural event would take place. *Malanca* from Crasna attracted the attention of several citizens in recent years, especially due to television broadcasts. This was why many people were confused by the large number of characters and asked many questions about the stages of this folk-play. In other words, the document had to be quickly written, but had to satisfy all the spectators' dilemmas.

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Olga was desperately asking for my help in writing the material. The document had to be produced in just a few hours because a few more hours would be necessary for it to be translated into Ukrainian and then checked for any possible mistakes. Though I immediately understood the task, I realized at the same time that I did not have the overall view on Crasna's *Malanca* needed in order to write on the spur of the moment such a document. Suddenly, Victor came up with the idea that, as veteran of this ritual, he could provide me with all the required information, and I could just write the document based on that. Our agreement was that I could ask as many questions as I wanted, and he had to answer me; and in case he did not know the answer, he should call his friends in the village to find out. Said and done!

I immediately accepted the task without realizing that I would enter one of the greatest challenges I had met as anthropologist. Mrs. Maria began making preparations for the New Year dinner, caroling children came to the door every 20 minutes, a light bulb had broken in the room where we were working, and an electrician living nearby came to fix it. Besides all

this, Mrs. Maria began an endless dialogue with Florin, and the neighbor who was an electrician learned that I had come from America and started to ask me curious questions. In this atmosphere, I was asking Victor questions about *Malanca* and he was trying to answer me as accurately as possible, sometimes calling his friends for further clarification. Under these conditions, I do not even know how I managed to produce in three hours a two-and-a-half pages long paper about the *Malanca of Crasna*. At the end of this work, I had the comprehensive vision I had hoped for on this ritual. Thus, after writing this document, we could all have dinner, this time more relaxed than before. Soon afterwards, Mr. Gheorghe, our friend, arrived in the area not only to see *Malanca* in Crasna but also to meet us. We left the house only after the professional singer and music teacher Gheorghe Stratulat, impressed by the singing talent of Mrs. Olga's daughter, sang together with her a well-known folk melody.

After this moment, we left behind our new friends. Victor went to join his colleagues in the *Malanca* team; Maria remained at home with Victor's girlfriend - Natalia, to work on translating and writing the document in Ukrainian; Mrs. Maria was left alone to receive the carolers and I, Florin, Mr. Gheorghe and Mrs. Olga went together to accompany the *Malanca* from Putna village, recently set up and already walking by the first houses.

The group I saw in this village counted over 50 people, active participants, plus at least 200 people who followed the *Malanca*, without being part of its characters. It was also amazing for me to be able to see such numerous mummers group, knowing that, at the same time, in the other four villages of the *comună*, four comparable groups perform similar rituals. Together, all these pageants mobilized not less than 300 young people in the village. To these, one should add the older persons involved in the organizing of at least two dinners for the *malancari* from their village, plus handymen who worked at masks and costumes. Thus, the number of those who actively participated with their work and practices for the *Malanca* in Crasna surpassed 500. Over 800 spectators (around 150-200 in every village) who only accompanied *Malanca* should also be added. So, this was by far the largest number of active participants I had ever seen involved in a winter ritual in all my anthropological work in the rural world. I explained this fact through the geographical position of Crasna, just 8 kilometers from the border with Romania. This apparently insignificant fact got many people in the *comună* involved in small trade activities between Ukraine and Romania, which kept international migration from Crasna to Western Europe at relatively low rates. Another

important factor was probably the population growth of the locality, constantly increasing at all population censuses from 1930 to 2015.

This pageant made out of so many people in the village of Putna radiated a really incredible energy. The element that immediately attracted my attention was the multitude of Romanian symbols. Almost every group of characters, from Gypsies to bears, and from Jews to old men and old women, wore the Romanian flag as scarves, headbands or girdles. In the case of the kings and queens, the tricolor flag was a basic component of the costume decorated with tricolor scarves around the chest. Another national element was the inclusion in the *Malanca* of the dance and song called *Hora Unirii*<sup>55</sup>, played by kings and queens during the theatrical-musical performance they presented in the courtyards of the households.

The characters that impressed me the most were the mummers embodying the *Gypsies* who were bare-chested or lightly dressed with T-shirts (an admirable performance for the -8 °C temperature outside), carrying wood maces weighing 25-30 kilograms and long rough knives made of wrought iron. I was also impressed by *The Bears* dressed in thick sedge suits also weighing 30-40 kilograms. In fact, the whole sequence with the *Gypsies*, the masters of the *Bears* pulling the chains on the "animals" following them in four paws and uttering guttural sounds, seemed to be a scene taken out of a history movie. However, all the characters emanated something picturesque and exaggerated. It was easy to notice that the theatrical-dramatic mark of the custom had once disappeared and was almost entirely replaced by the extravagance of the costumes and characters involved in the ritual. If one were to characterize the *Malanca* in Crasna in three words, those words would be: gigantic, extravagant, bombastic. That is why Horia-Barbu Oprișan's hypothesis according to which Bucovina's *Malanca* had agglutinated over time many rural rituals that had initially had their autonomy, such as *The Bears*, *The Dance of the Goat*, *The Small Horses*, as well as characters such as *Old Men* and *Old Women* taken from other autonomous village rituals, seemed to me very relevant for the *Malanca* in Crasna (Oprișan 1981:176-177).

After two hours of walking throughout the village of Putna, at a certain moment we observed something amazing: apart from me and Florin, there was no one outside the village to film this pageant. The darkness of the night and the continuous repetition of the ritual

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<sup>55</sup> *Hora Unirii* - Poetry composed by poet Vasile Alecsandri in 1856, three years before the Romanian Principalities get united on January 24, 1859. Subsequently, the composer Alexandru Flechtenmacher wrote the music for this poem that was sung and danced in Iași on the occasion of the union of Moldova with Țara Românească.

scenario at each household seem to have transformed it into an unattractive event for reporters. After visiting several households together with this numerous group of people, we decided to go to Suceveni, where Mr. Gheorghe promised to show us a well-organized and well-played *Dance of the Goat*. We took the road to the North, crossing again the barriers of the mummers-policemen, and went to the house of an acquaintance of Mr. Gheorghe in Suceveni, where the *Dance of the Goat* team just happened to enter his courtyard. We went along with the whole group and, to my surprise, I had the opportunity to observe an extraordinary ritual with the animal being sick and falling to the ground, a moment followed by its healing by two mummers dressed as *Old Women* and another one wearing a demon mask. The disenchantment itself was absent this time, replaced by caresses of the *Old Women* on the back of the *Goat* and the guttural sounds of the *Demon* that seemed to be most affected by the death of the "animal". There were also officers, characters dressed in folk costumes called *Irod*, and a *Small Horse* - all just dancing and apparently having no direct connection with the moment of the death and the spectacular resurrection of the *Goat*. This type of *Goat ritual*, with the shamanic moment of the animal dying followed by its resurrection, had almost disappeared throughout Romania, being still present only in the Transylvanian region and almost nowhere in Moldova where the death and resurrection of the animal occurred only in the case of *The Dance of the Deer*, but not in *The Dance of the Goat*.

At the end of the play, of course, I tried to talk to the wearer of the goat mask. Unfortunately, he was just a good performer, but he knew almost nothing about the meaning of death and the rebirth of the *Goat*. However, after our brief dialogue, he stayed around us, listening to the conversation between me and Mr. Gheorghe. I explained to Mr. Gheorghe about the rarity of this type of *Goat* ritual, still present "only in a few places in Romania, in some villages in Russia, Estonia and the Nordic countries." Upon hearing my words, the wearer of the *Goat* mask intervened, finishing my words with an unconcealed pride ... "and let us not forget that also in Suceveni!" After the guy left, Mr. Gheorghe, immediately remarked the local patriotism note in this man's words: "See, he did not say that the *Goat* is either from Ukraine or from Bucovina, but from Suceveni, his village!" We followed the *Dance of the Goat* team just a few more houses and, afterwards, immediately after midnight, we went to our apartment in Cernăuți. On the next day, the *Dance of the Deer* team from Heleşteni was due to come in Ukraine.

#### 4. Heleşteni's *Dance of the Deer* Team's Journey to Ukraine – Mummers' Plays Became Transnational

Indeed, the next morning at 10:00 we were already waiting for our friends from Heleşteni at a gas station close to the border with Romania. The *Dance of the Deer* team was this time a smaller one, with just ten members. The condition for participation in the Cernăuți festival was that each participant had a passport. However, few important members of this team felt that the investment of \$20 was too big, so they preferred not to come. The rest of the expenses, such as the two-night hotel and transport from Iași to Cernăuți, were covered by the *Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture Iași* and the *County Council* of the county. In addition to the ten members of the team, the director of the mentioned center, Mr. Aurel Ardelean, and the mayor of Heleşteni had also arrived with the same microbus.

To my surprise, I saw two minibuses at the border instead of one. The second one, much bigger than the first, had the name of the *Center for Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture Bucovina* and the *Suceava County Council* marked on it. This center of the Suceava county had also sent a crew to the Cernăuți festival. This crew was more numerous than the *Deer team* in Heleşteni. It was a team of the *Dance of the Goat* from *Mălini comună*, Suceava county, headed by the director of the *Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture Bucovina*, the well-known folk music singer Călin Brăteanu. This large team consisted of four *Goats*, two *Small Horses* and 12 professional singers, including five women and seven men (three drummers, one flute player, 1 *cobza* player in the person of Călin Brăteanu himself and the rest of the team consisting of singers). I did not know at that time, but I later learned that the program of the day was already organized by the two cultural centers in Iași and Suceava counties and the *Bucovina Art Center for the Preservation and Promotion of the Traditional Romanian Culture* in Cernăuți.

The entire cultural activity that followed was called, paraphrasing the verse of a carol collected in Romanian villages: *From house to house*. The two teams toured afterwards during the whole day, with several stops and recitals: at the *Maria Restaurant* in *Oprîșeni comună*, at a few houses in the *comunele* Carapciu, Suceveni and Crasna. The owner of the *Maria Restaurant*, where the most pompous weddings in the region were held, had worked for years in various Western European countries. Back home, and after a successful investment, he wanted to see, as he told me, "a true carol recital" in front of the property he had built not



too long ago. He also offered a small breakfast to all those present, plus 500 hryvnia for each of the two teams. Subsequently, in the *comună* of Carapciu, the two teams stopped to carol at several houses where the respective householders, connected to the *Bucovina Art Center for Conservation and Promotion of the Traditional Romanian Culture* in Cernăuți, expressed their desire to see in their courtyard the performance of two mummers' plays teams coming from Romania. The same happened in Suceveni where a more elaborate recital took place in a large household in the center of the locality. There was also a spontaneously *hora* dance involving almost all the 200 viewers who had come from the whole village to attend the event. After this incredible warm welcoming, the events lasted longer than everybody had expected. Thus, the two teams arrived at Crasna, just after 4:00 p.m., where they held their last show that day.

It is true that the two teams had come from a neighboring country, but the type of folk theater, songs and dances performed were known by the villagers, and they resonated perfectly with them. I realized this when observing the natural way they got involved into the plays and interacted with the performers. In addition, the shows were very similar to the way local mummers played in their own village: the teams went from house to house and performed in the courtyards, and the households received them with wine, cakes, money and especially with the hospitality and the love of their families. This entire event offered me a sample of the rural world with the charm of winter holidays. Although the whole event had previously been planned by the organizers, this time I had the clear impression that this was the type of patrimonization that had to be implemented to safeguard those forms of rural culture threatened by extinction.

## **5. Mummers' Parade in Crasna: Peasant Culture, Tourism and Postmodernity**

Coming to Crasna, the *comună* would surprise me once again with the magic, exuberance, and why not, even with the madness of the New Year's collective celebration. All five different *Malănci* teams came from their own villages now filling the main street of the *comună* with numerous characters such as the *Bears, Kings, Queens, Gypsies, Jews, Old Men, Old Women, Small horses, Demons, Frankenstein, satirized Politicians, Transvestites, Policemen, Border Officers, Clowns*, etc. In addition to these, there were other villagers who were just gathering there to watch, but most of the crowd was represented by the hundreds of tourists coming from all over Ukraine and Romania. I managed to deduce this by reading the car plates. These cars no longer had parking places on the main street and were parked on all

the narrow side roads, off the main road. In this crowd, I saw dozens of groups of reporters with cameras and iPhones that did not stop capturing the participants from all favorable angles. And, to make it even more crowded, there were also a lot of vendors around who were trying to sell all kind of things like sandwiches, cotton sugar, sweet bread, bananas and wafers. In all this turmoil, the mummers parading on this overwhelmed street embodied everything that could be ridiculed, from policemen to border officers and from politicians to celebrities.

Unlike other similar rituals in Romanian villages, here I saw trucks with platforms carrying teams of 5-10 people. These people were dancing on music on these platforms or performed a kind of pantomime sketches to impress the viewers. Of all these assemblies, the most common character performing on the improvised stages was the transvestite. I read about such events and I knew they existed in Bulgaria (Creed 2011), but I had never seen such events in the Romanian villages I studied. The motorized platforms carrying these fragments of the village world awoke once again in my mind the image of the rural customs exported by the waves of modernity to the urban world and in the spotlights of the stage spectacles. Of all these platforms, one in particular drew my attention. It also had a meaningful title, so that everyone could know what it was: *Nunta Țăcănească* (The Wedding of the Crazy People)<sup>56</sup>. That placard made me smile instantly. *Nunta Țărănească* (The Peasant Wedding) was also a folk-play celebrated by peasants around the New Year. The mummers of this play mocked the fast, and the sumptuousness of a wedding in the rural world. Both the bridegroom and the bride were ridiculed, but especially the priest and his dogmatic discourse were mocked, along with the Godfather and all the wedding guests. Well, *Nunta Țăcănească* (The Wedding of the Crazy People) scorned this ritual, which had already ridiculed a peasant custom. Maybe that was the reason why on the platform a wedding where all the participants were transvestites dancing on disco music had been imagined. This representation brought to my mind the concepts of postmodern philosophy, in which interpretation and deconstruction managed to prevail over the so-called "objective" facts.

One day before, we had been able to see in Crasna the village community celebrating the *Malanca* ritual alone. Nevertheless, Crasna was now a world well anchored in the dynamics of the modern world and its realities. Moreover, Crasna during the New Year's day, I was about to realize, was nothing but a miniature of the Cernăuți city of the next day.

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<sup>56</sup> A play on words. In Romanian language, *țăcănit* means somebody who has lost his mind. *Nunta Țăcănească* in this case could be translated as the *Wedding of the Crazy People*.

Commerce, political interest, tourism, and mass media had transformed a community ritual into a modern attraction, quite fascinating for the urban public coming there from the entire Ukraine and even from beyond its borders.

## **6. *The International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca in Cernăuți: A Rio de Janeiro's Carnival of Eastern Europe***

Indeed, the next day I would find the city of Cernăuți in a similar atmosphere. The crew of the Heleşteni's *Deer* was accommodated at *Hotel Oasis*, located at the entrance in Cernăuți. As early as 8:00 a.m., from the window of the hotel, I began to see platforms carried by trucks entering the city. On these platforms, gigantic constructions such as a rooster, a pair of reindeer and a bunch of Santa Clauses had been placed. They came from the towns neighboring Cernăuți, and headed to the city center where their parade would later take place. Compared to all these gigantic platforms where mummers dressed in extravagant costumes with shining colors were dancing, the team of the *Deer* in Heleşteni seemed small and insignificant. This impression became stronger when we got to a central square of the city, called Mitropoliei (Sobornaia). Right there our *Deer* team got off from the microbus directly into the street, among the people. Immediately, there was an ad-hoc performance right in front of the Christmas tree, to the delight of the large audience gathered there. During this first street performance, I noticed a fact that would become the most frequent occurrence during the following hours spent on the streets of Cernăuți: the hundreds of iPhones, photo and video cameras in the hands of the bunch of people on the streets of the urban center, now overcrowded, and headed, as if attracted by an invisible magnet, straight to the festival participants.

Thereafter, Iurie Levicic, the representative of the *Bucovina Art Center for Conservation and Promotion of the Traditional Romanian Culture Cernăuți*, made way through crowd waves for the members of the *Deer* crew from Heleşteni, so that they could join the *Malanca* teams who were already coming in a line to the Mitropoliei Square, on the roadway now closed to traffic. Some of these *Malănci* were folklore ensembles dressed in traditional costumes and accompanied by groups of musicians, similar to the Romanian bands that participated in the festival. As in the case of the folk festivals I had seen in Romania, each participating team had a representative in front of the group, with a placard in his hands where the viewers could read the name of the locality that team came from. In addition, there was always a distance of a few meters between two teams. Others so-called "Malănci" had

nothing to do with the rural custom they had taken their name from. It was actually the same kind of platforms that I had seen that morning from the hotel window. These "Malănci", too, had written the name of the locality their members came from on a banner on the front or side of their platforms. But otherwise there were big differences between the two types of teams.

However, for the sightseeing tourists the most impressive were the "Malănci" on the platforms. These were in some cases only large statues made of cardboard, silicone, wood or various other materials. Some of these were really giant, reaching the height of over three meters and occupying almost the entire road. Impressive in its size was a Trojan horse surrounded by Greek soldiers and on whose back was Odysseus himself dressed in an antique Greek soldier's suit. However, this impressive horse was pulled by a banal agricultural tractor that made a lot of noise and made it clear that the convoy was also the creation of rural craftsmen. Of the same size was a Sphinx smartly built on the cabin and dump of a truck whose form or brand could no longer be seen because of the carcass artificially built above it. There was also a pirate-ship filled with frightening figures, followed by a platform with Mexican singers impossible to mistake because of their large *sombreros* and long mustaches. Immediately after - an improvised tram full of "striptease dancers" who were actually men dressed in hideous costumes representing ugly bodies of nude women. I also managed to identify monsters, and a three-headed dragon, a Batman, a Frankenstein, Devils, Kazak dancers, "Russian soldiers" satirized as demons, a Gypsy camp, Santa Claus and his cheerleaders of American inspiration. Last but not least, I could glimpse even "Charlie Chaplin" and "Donald Trump" among the participants. In all this panoply of representations, there were also symbols of Romanian and Ukrainian folklore. Thus, the main character - the rooster of the story *Punguța cu Doi Bani* (The Bag with Two Pennies) by the classical writer Ion Creanga, was also present among the festival participants, being 3 meters high and carried on a motorized platform. It was actually the same rooster I had seen that morning entering in the city. Likewise, I was able to see at one point the "Saint Melania" from which the name of the *Malancă* is believed to come from.

Crasna's *malancari*, also present there, had the same type of team as in the village, composed of *Kings*, *Queens*, *Small Horses*, *Jews*, *Gypsies* and *Bears* made of sedge. These bears crawled on their foot around the *Gypsies* masters, to the delight of the audience, filling the streets of Cernăuți with a lot of straw. All these bands made Cernăuți resemble a Rio de Janeiro carnival of the folk cultures. But at a closer look, there was actually a combination between the *Rio Festival*, the *Philadelphia Mimmers' Parade* and the Romanian Folklore

Festivals like those in the cities of Iași or Vatra Dornei. Obviously, it was an unexpected encounter between the capitalist cultural industry (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) and the rural traditional culture escaping into the realm of show and entertainment.

“The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry”, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I had noticed the desire of museification of the folk culture of all Romanian folklore festivals, had almost disappeared in Cernăuți. Only the title of the event - *The International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca* - and the costumes of few bands who stubbornly wanted to preserve their rural spirit, reminded the viewers about the peasant culture in Cernăuți. In general, this one had been replaced by the cultural industry specific to capitalism, whose influence radiated through all the pores of the festival. Everything around seemed to be made for consumption. From the candy bars, sausages, barbecue, sugar cottons, balloons and ornaments sold in the city's main city squares, and the restaurants and bars around that were full of people, to the hotels that had been fully booked the day of the festival, everything was destined for the urban audience to consume in its rush to experience the "rural savory".

## **7. Cannibalizing Mummers' Plays**

Indeed more than anything else, it was all about cultural consumption. All the bands wandering through the streets of Cernăuți passed immediately in front of the "eyes" of the cameras of local and national Ukrainian televisions and from there they instantly entered the online space or even the direct broadcasts of news departments. At the same time, the images taken during the festival would appear in the next few days in television programs and articles of the written press. But more than anything, every iPhone and camera in the hands of the spectators would bring the thousands of images taken during the festival into the private space of the people participating there. From there, they would go directly to the personal pages of Facebook, Hi5, Twitter, as well as YouTube and other social media sites, reaching out to even more viewers. Walking alongside the *Deer* team in Heleşteni, I noticed how every few minutes a group of 2-3 spectators came out of the crowd, stopped the members of the *Deer* team from Heleşteni for a few seconds and took a picture with them. The same was true for all the teams in front of and behind our group, so the parade slowly moved like an earth worm with frequent stumbling blocks. At the same time, the gendarmes on the sidelines were too few and totally ineffective anyway in stopping these continuous incursions of the spectators from the sides in order to take photos with the members of the *Malănci* teams.

Finally, the folklore teams reached the festival stage, where only the *Malănci* prepared for this part of the competition had arrived. The trucks with platforms carrying giant statues and dancing teams continued their way across the other streets of the city. Part of the viewers followed them with their iPhones and photo cameras, while another less numerous part remained in the the Philharmonic Square to watch the folklore competition. Here, things happened the same way as in the festivals I had seen in Romania. The teams that had managed to transform folk culture into an exciting and dynamic amalgam, combining in an attractive way various elements such as songs, dances and folk plays, were those that received the appreciation of the public and then the prizes offered by the jury. More traditionalist teams such as the *Deer* of Heleşteni, aiming to transpose a fragment of authentic rural culture on stage, received only a few anemic applauses instead.

Not long after the stage performance of the *Deer* team from Heleşteni, the *Malanca-Fest* came to an end. Many spectators were already leaving in small groups to the parking lots in order to be able to withdraw as quickly as possible from the overcrowded city. Other tourists, following another strategy, went to the hotel rooms and rented apartments where they hoped to be able to leave only the next day, avoiding the big crowd on the festival day. Being among those who had to leave the same day, the members of the *Deer* team were now walking towards their microbus, situated more than one kilometer away. But along this road their colorful costumes, the beaded helmets, and especially the *Deer's* mask with huge horns and mobile jaws, were constantly attracting the attention of the numerous groups of tourists still on the city's streets. Unavoidable, the most daring of them asked the team to stop for a few seconds to take pictures of them. So, until reaching the microbus, the band made at least twenty more stops.

Finally reaching our car, Florin, dressed in a bear-leader suit and visibly tired after that full day, sighed hard saying: "Done! The pictures with the monkey are over!" Surprised by this statement whose full sense was just beginning to emerge in my mind, I asked him what he had really meant. Florin smiled slyly, and said: "What, haven't you ever taken pictures with the monkey at the seaside?" This response brought me a memory back from the times of my adolescence. Going with my family to Eforie Nord, a seaside resort at the Black Sea, I took a picture of me next to a monkey. Professional photographers from the Romanian seaside resorts used to come to the beach accompanied by their small monkeys that walked next to them kept in leash. The monkeys were trained to climb on the shoulders of tourists who wanted to be immortalized with an animal brought from a distant continent. Considered

an exotic animal, the monkey immediately attracted the attention of curious tourists who paid twice the price of a normal picture, only to be photographed together with the animal coming from remote lands. Remembering all of this when I later got home, I found my photo with the monkey, in fact an old rherus macaque, dated July 1987. At the age of 13, I was also the kind of tourist wishing to be near an exotic being, without knowing anything about its habitat, temperament and behavior.

Extrapolating, I started to look around and ask myself how many of the hundreds of people who had photographed the *Deer* from Heleşteni knew or wanted to know something about the ritual and the cultural micro-ecosystem that had created it. Apart from the fact that the cultural heritage of the Heleşteni *comună* had become transnational, entering the houses and computers of the Ukrainians, was this an appreciation of peasant values and of the culture that gave rise to the ritual? Or was it rather a kind of consumption of momentary pleasures made possible by cultural industry and mass-culture, a fact that contradicted the creativity and freedom of the humans who, in the past, had created their own entertainment through their own means? I also wondered how many of the tourists on the street seeing *Malanca* of Crasna and the *Malăncile* of the other villages from southern Cernăuți region could and would like to know and to understand the recent disturbing history of these rituals and of the communities performing them?

In any case, following the observation of the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions – Bucovina's Malanca*, my conclusion was not that the participating teams, even those on the truck-transported platforms, would lack creativity or would be inferior to the *Malănci* produced in the rural universe. On the contrary, these participants also demonstrated an exceptional inventiveness, involving energy and time for the completion of cultural products with ephemeropteran existence. But they were meant to survive only during the few hours of parading the streets of the city and being offered to an audience who in many cases knew nothing about the symbols and history behind the masks and costumes, but could easily consume them if they had the financial resources to visit Cernăuți during the festival. In my opinion, this type of festivalization represented in fact the death of those theatrical forms incarnated by mummers' plays where spectators became participants and participants became spectators in a burlesque culture based on community memory. Through this collective memory, such interactions and communication were possible because the rural customary communities represented that system of vessels through which this exchange took place. For a researcher of the rural culture like me, the entire show represented not only a sort of

urbanization of traditions, but also a form of exporting them to the world of entertainment, show, mass consumerism and global tourism.

## **8. Globalization, Invisibility, Symbolic Violence... and also Hope**

Festivals such as the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca* in Cernăuți and *Mummers' Parade* in Philadelphia bring symbols and representations that come from the peasant culture that gave birth to all mummers' plays. However, few spectators attending them are aware of this, can and want to understand rural culture by participating in these parade type festivals. Despite its posting in the spotlight of the modern world, peasants' culture has become even more invisible than before. It is an invisibility designed by stratified societies in which peasants have always had a marginal position, and lately by all those entities that Van der Ploeg called the *Empire* (Ploeg 2009: 269). This designed invisibility is in fact an active process that leads to the marginalization of the peasants and deny their economic and cultural rights. All this sum of factors is in fact a subtle form of violence that Bourdieu has well circumscribed through the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). From all these processes, a kind of blindness toward peasant culture results, and it is not only present in the minds of tourists who come to these festivals in search of cheap fun, but also in the minds of many scholars in the field of social sciences.

Perhaps better than ever, I realized this when, between 30 April and 1 May 2017, I attended an international symposium entitled *The Role of Heritage in Migration and Displacement*. I made a presentation there entitled *Global Depeasantization and Peasants' Intangible Cultural Heritage*. The basic idea of my presentation was that with the process of depeasantization in recent decades, the cultural heritage of the peasants suffered a continuous process of deterioration and disappearance. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, I argued, in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a great number of customs and traditions belong to peasant culture. Of all the participants in that symposium, I was the only one who used *the peasant* concept to refer to a particular social group and its cultural heritage. This happened despite the fact that, when some of the participants talked about 'refugees', 'displaced people', 'migrants' and 'unemployed youth', I could clearly distinguish the sensibilities, behaviors and lifestyles belonging to peasants.

I understood the mystery behind this problem when, in the break after my presentation, an Australian researcher asked me if the peasants really existed and were not



just a concept invented by a particular orientation in social sciences at a certain historical moment. Another English professor asked me how I could figure out which of the customs in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage belonged to peasants. These questions made me meditate deeper on my position as researcher of Eastern Europe's rural culture. For me - who started studying this culture in 2000 - the reality of the peasant world has become something undisputed. And since I had been in contact for years with this culture, through all the senses and pores of my being, it had become something self-obvious that did not require much explanation. The smell of freshly cut hay and of the smoked pork in the attic of the house; the taste of the fresh cheese that has just been taken out of the barrels by the shepherds; the noise of the herd of cows that leave in the morning to the pastures outside the village, run by the cowman of the village; the fine unmistakable texture of lambs' fur only a few hours after they were born; the picturesque image of the haystacks placed from place to place on a hilly field and the shepherds' wood stall surrounded by the flock of sheep; last but not least, the mummers with their specific noise of bells and rattles, and the vivid colors of their costumes on the white snow background; all these are things I have perceived and that remained deeply impressed on my soul. But it would be hard for me to explain to anyone who had never had a contact with them. More, a mere fugitive glance at the UNESCO list of *Intangible Cultural Heritage* could not make me believe that "Albanian folk iso-polyphony", "Azerbaijani carpet weaving", "The Chinese Hua'er" or "Oxherding and oxcart traditions in Costa Rica" belong to a social class different than that of the peasants.

Unfortunately, for a long time, peasants have been viewed just as underdogs (Shanin 1971:15), a social class whose capacity to organize, defend and promote their own interests was very low. Moreover, in the last few decades, under the influence of globalization, everything related to peasant society, from economic to social and cultural aspects seems to enter an accelerated decline, which made Hobsbawm state the death of peasantry. But, as the great religions of mankind and at the same time the principles of biology and genetics teach us, where the principle of death stands, there is also revival and resurrection. Even Mummers' Plays, with the ritual of death and resurrection of the animal under the hand of his master - in fact a genuine shaman, talk about the same very simple principle.

Globalization brought with it the birth of the world's most impressive peasant organization. *Via Campesina* or *The Peasants' Way* was founded in 1993, bringing together peasants' associations from several countries and continents. Today, this organization is one of the largest in the world. It is a coalition of over 164 peasant organizations spread around

the globe and with more than 200 million members who advocate for the rights of this social class that has suffered severe infringements by food corporations and intergovernmental organizations such as the World Trade Organization. In relation to the motivations and goals of *Via Campesina*, Dr. Christophe Golay, Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Project on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (Geneva Academy), wrote a document entitled *Negotiation of a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas*. This document created the basis for serious negotiations with the United Nations for the recognition of the rights of this social class, rights that have often been violated or ignored. This document also talks about the peasants' social and cultural rights (Golay 2015) even though its main objectives are those related to peasants' economic rights. Perhaps in the near future, the peasants' cultural rights, including the right to recognize their property on intangible cultural heritage forms in the UNESCO list, will be promoted.

In recent years, people interested in rural traditions have increasingly considered the online medium as an extremely effective way to promote them. Practitioners of rural oral traditions and those interested in these cultural forms are getting together more and more often in the virtual space of the Internet to discuss and promote the customs of their own communities. In 2017, the Heleşteni's mayor made a Facebook page where he posted photos during the cultural events organized in his village. In just a few months, the site was visited by several thousand people, gathering appreciation not only from people in Romania but also from Israel, Belgium, France and England. Ethnologist Bogdan Neagota also drew attention to this fact, noting that in recent years more and more peasants whose rituals and customs are being studied by *Orma Sodalitas Anthropologica* are requesting that the videos made by *Orma* members be posted on YouTube.

YouTube itself became a form of patrimonialization. It is a form of patrimonialization through which the performers of a ritual/ceremonial complex assert their community identity in front of other local communities. But, at the same time, this form of patrimonialization contributes to the emergence from the isolation state of certain customs, and the awakening of peasants' comparative consciousness, if I may say that. Villagers from isolated localities begin to realize that their customs are not singular, but they are part of a sort of network of such habits (Rus and Neagota 2016).

Besides all this, many of the sons and daughters of the peasants who had left their village, guided by higher aspirations, and became something more than simple rural workers, have not forgotten the traditions of their native lands and have promoted them in their travels around the world, sometimes at the highest levels and among people who have very little in common with the rural culture today. Mihai Alexa, the current technical director of the *Dacia - Renault Group* in Pitești city, left Hărmăneasa, his native village, at the age of 14, to follow his high school studies in Roman city, and the university training at the Polytechnic Institute of Bucharest. Being *comoraș* in *The Dance of The Goat* team in his village four years in a row during his teenage, he told me that it is very likely that many of his qualities as good organizer and manager had been acquired or perfected during adolescence when he has made use of all the logistics necessary to achieve such teams and the rituals associated to them.

I am happy to come home to the village every year, especially during the winter holidays, because there I feel the best. However, I can no longer say I am a peasant, because I have never made a living from agricultural work. But I am a peasant's son, and my origin is in the countryside. I say this with pride. Just because I grew up in the countryside I have a good education, based on strong principles and values. All these helped me later in all the challenges of my life. Even though today Romania is going through a period of deep agitation and unrest, I believe that true values will never disappear. These values, at least in the case of our country, are indissolubly linked to the peasant world. I have always kept in touch with the life of my village, and even if I live in another city and travel a lot in foreign countries, I have always promoted the authentic traditions of my village in all the places I have been. I also talk to many of my interlocutors about my childhood and the rural universe where I spent it. Childhood and adolescence are part of my identity, and of every human being, I believe, and they always have a sacred place in the consciousness (Mihai Alexa, 58 years old, January 24, 2018, Phone Interview).

In 2012, immediately after having finished the documentary *Behind the Masks*, made by Monica Heintz, my colleague, and myself, with the support of the Paris Ovest Nanterre La Defense University and the French University Institute, Mr. Mihai Alexa asked us to send him a few copies of it with French subtitles added. At one of his meetings with his French colleagues from *Renault* Company, Mr. Alexa offered them a copy of the documentary. One of these colleagues, Mr. Alexa remembered, even stated in one of the subsequent meetings that "only then could he fully understand what the true spirit of the winter holidays was and,

especially, why his Romanian employees want to be free during the end of the year, in order to spend their winter holidays within the family and community."

All the ways and means made possible by globalization, have in turn become forms of patrimonialization of rural culture and peasant rituals that become transnational in the meantime. Perhaps more than through official channels, peasants' culture becomes known and promoted despite the processes that led to its erosion. The story and the recourse to memory (the one that makes any story possible) are two phenomena that have accompanied human beings throughout their journey on this planet. Those who have lived in the rural culture and who have been in contact with the rituals of the world such as mummers' plays, will always carry them in their souls, for these have been landmarks on the community memory map and have decisively marked their personality traits as human beings. As long as these people are alive, even if they work and live in other countries or cities away from their native villages, stories about mummers' plays will circulate and will be heard in the most unexpected places in the world. And, if one day in the future mummers' plays disappear completely from the rural universe and everyone who has ever listened to them is gone, those interested in the village world and the values that governed it will find all these rituals, customs and traditions anytime in the virtual space, and will thus be able to find out what these had meant for the rural communities that begot, performed and promoted them over time.

## **E. Conclusions**

The end of the 20th century marked one of the most bombastic theses on peasantry. Eric Hobsbawm decreed the death of peasantry and the cessation of a way of life that had marked the cultural evolution of mankind over a long period of time. Meanwhile, authors such as Farshad A. Araghi, A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Cristobal Kay, Deborah Bryceson, and Van Der Ploeg have thoroughly analyzed and reformulated this statement. The most valid conclusion that emerges from this research is that, rather than disappearing without a trace, the peasantry adapts to the new conditions of the market economy and globalization, becoming something else than it has been so far. Van Der Ploeg is the author who uses a relevant concept in this regard: *The New Peasantry*. *The New Peasantry* is represented by a critical mass of people who carry out small-scale agricultural work and is defined by their struggle against the *Empire*. The *Empire* is composed of global food corporations, agribusiness groups, large retailers, state apparatuses, scientific models and technologies that

together form the tentacles of a transnational reality spread across the planet. In these new economic, political and social conditions, it is obvious that peasant communities suffer radical transformations. These transformations are not only economic and social, but also axiological. The system of values that has guided the peasant's life for centuries has begun to fall apart, being replaced by other ways of being and seeing the world. And these, in turn, have also affected the cultural heritage of the peasants of which the mummers' plays are an important part.

Authors such as Robert Redfield, Katherine Verdery and Katy Fox have observed that in recent decades we have been witnessing a process of crumbling of peasant values under the pressure of multiple causes. In particular, economic and legislative factors have been highlighted among the most important agents of the erosion of the peasant system of values (Verdery 2003; Fox 2011). For me, as researcher of the Romanian rural universe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, labor migration proved to be one of the phenomena that contributed most to the undermining of those values formed in the cultural micro-ecosystems of the rural localities studied. The emigrant - who has become an invisible presence in the rural world - is the one who has made a lasting connection between the rural universe and other ways of conceiving the world encountered in the Western European societies where he/she is currently working. This kind of emigrant is also the one who has brought other images of the world even in the most isolated Romanian villages, in strong disjunction with the values of the rural world, through channels such as phone and internet.

Under the invasion of this information from other worlds and system of values in the rural universe, elderly people in particular have embraced ideas and doctrines considered to be stricter, but also closer to peasant values. Many of them embrace the new Christian Neo-Protestant denominations that offer the sense of belonging to a community with more rigorous principles and values than those of the young peasants raised and educated during the postsocialist period. Paradoxically, this phenomenon that could apparently lead to the conservation of the peasants' system of values, turns into yet another stream that leads to their erosion. This is because people embracing the doctrine of these denominations no longer perform rituals such as mummers' plays, and no longer receive carolers in their house because of religious reasons. On the other hand, young people and children in the countryside have other aspirations that lead them to study or work outside their native villages and even outside their country. Aware of the fact that these will remove them from the rural rituals that marked their childhood, they see the new situation as an unavoidable path in their life.

All these trends have attracted the attention of many people interested in maintaining and promoting rural traditions, and especially in their long-term fate. Unlike in the past when these rituals were performed by customary communities within a complex system of social relationships, now it is increasingly necessary to intervene from outside in order to safeguard them. However, one of the most acute problems that arise is whether or not these interventions cause an alteration of the authenticity of these rituals. The issue has long been debated in heritage studies, and the conclusion of many researchers was that the process of patrimonialization through state-run institutions, programs, and even international organizations, produces substantial changes to the safeguarded culture.

In Romania, a country whose dictatorial past was closely intertwined with the phenomenon of patrimonialization of rural traditions - defined as the traditions of the people - these patrimonial practices of the past have strongly influenced the present-day safeguarding activities. Stage folklore festivals and folk team competitions have become the most widespread forms of safeguarding oral rural culture. Essentially, these festivals have become processes of museification of the rural culture, increasingly resembling a set of frozen cultural forms subsequently presented to the public, rather than living cultural forms that could speak about the current dynamics of rural communities. These transformations are due not only to the fact that they are "exported" to cities through folklore festivals, but also to the presence of prizes that make the competitions even more bitter and intense, and to the media that instantly transfers them to the homes of hundreds of thousands of lovers of peasant traditions.

Three visible processes such as *festivalization*, *urbanization* and *mass-mediating* accompany these patrimonialization practices. Paradoxically, they create another type of culture than the one aimed to be safeguarded, one whose life is parallel and autonomous compared to the rural world and peasant culture. Transported to festivals stages, mummies' plays are no longer ways of solving communities' problems and "story(s) people tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1972:26), but "lifeless artifacts" in a sort of "open air museums of the peasant culture." All this leads to the peasants' alienation of their own rituals, such as mummies' plays, while the TV becomes the increasingly favorite medium of relating to them.

The end of my field research did not take me to Heleşteni or Ruginoasa, but outside Romania's borders, to Ukraine. I got there following the *Deer* team in Heleşteni at the

*International Cultural Traditions Festival - Bucovina's Malanca* in the city of Cernăuți, located in the south of Ukraine. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the cultural heritage of the peasants, even if born in cultural micro-ecosystems, leaves behind these borders, along even with the borders of the country where they had been living for a long time, becoming transnational and changing their property regime.

More than in other areas where I had conducted field research, the contact with the rural area of southern Cernăuți revealed to me the way mummers' plays have been influenced over the past decades by the political factor. The tumultuous recent history of these communities was the background for creating a new meaning for mummers' play. They became forms of resistance against the official discourse and atrocious policies of the Soviet dictatorial state against ethnic minority groups like the Romanians from southern Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Unlike in Romania, mummers' plays were means of affirmation and preservation of the ethnic identity for the Romanian communities in the villages of Northern Bucovina. Not a few times during the Soviet Union, mummers' plays in these villages went through "the storms of history", their performers being severely persecuted and punished. The entire recent history of mummers' plays in the region stands for this. Probably this is one of the reasons why, even today, the performers of the ritual called *Malanca* in these villages have a real aversion towards official politics, even that concerned with the patrimonialization of rural traditions. They make a clear distinction between the *Malanca* in the village and the *Malanca* sent at the festival of folklore in Cernăuți. These two are seen by villagers as two different, if not opposite, forms of culture.

Indeed, my presence at the *International Cultural Traditions Festival - Bucovina's Malanca* in Cernăuți has shown me that this type of events could tell the viewer almost nothing about the tumultuous history of the rural communities in Northern Bukovina and the way they faced the vicissitudes of history. In fact, this festival's morphology and organization is more like the *Rio de Janeiro Festival* and the *Philadelphia's Mummers Parade* than like folklore festivals in Romania. The intention of the museification of rural culture, present at all the folklore festivals I had attended in Romania, has almost disappeared at the festival in Cernăuți. This type of cultural event in which the "Malănci" are carried on truck platforms in order to impress thousands of tourists coming from all over Ukraine and Romania, is rather a perfect embodiment of the concept of cultural industry invented by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than an attempt to safeguard rural culture threatened by extinction. In such festivals, mummers' plays are just "consumer items", and

the symbols put on stage no longer tell anything about the rural culture that gave birth to the rituals. Thus, rural culture becomes exoticized, just to be later consumed as a form of entertainment.

In spite of the fact that it is placed in the spotlight, peasants' culture is even more invisible than when it was living between the borders of the cultural micro-ecosystems that produced it. As Van der Ploeg has well observed, it is about an invisibility created by those entities, individuals and institutions that have contributed to the subordination and marginalization of peasants in recent decades: global food empires, agribusiness groups, large retailers, state apparatuses, scientific models and technologies. But this type of fabricated invisibility is in fact an extremely active and subtle process that Bourdieu circumscribed well through the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Unfortunately, the type of invisibility and symbolic violence accompanying it have moved from the economic to the academic sphere where the peasant is seen more as an invention of thinkers in a certain historical-political context than as a reality of our times (Drace-Francis 2013).

However, globalization has brought about not only an acute process of depeasantization, but also the dissipation of this massive social class in all corners of the planet and in all major urban centers. In this context, international organizations that advocate for the rights of peasants have gathered under the umbrella of one of the world's largest existing organizations: *Via Campesina*. In addition to this type of militancy with overwhelming economic purposes, those who have lived under the auspices of peasant culture and have spent their childhood in the countryside will carry the mummies' plays in their souls, together with all the other traditions that marked their childhood and adolescence. Thus they will become ad-hoc patrimonialization agents of a type of safeguarding that is little discussed and even mentioned in heritage studies, but which has accompanied the life of human beings for millennia - the story. Through these involuntary and invaluable safeguarding agents, mummies' plays will become stories told in the most unexpected places and situations in the world. These people who will always be tied with invisible threads to the culture where they had spent a significant part of their lives, will find their "place of meeting" and communication in the virtual space of the internet, through social media sites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and, above all, *YouTube*. In addition to the state-led patrimonialization, through formal institutions and complex international organizations such as UNESCO, the type of safeguarding emerging from the globalization mantle will prove to be extremely persistent and effective in the future. Patrimonialization through state institutions often



proves its limits and effectiveness in safeguarding rural culture. This is a lesson demonstrating that institutions created by states or transnational organizations in just few years or at most few decades cannot replace certain cultural forms created by customary communities that have proven their efficiency over the centuries.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FINAL CONCLUSIONS

A brief look at the rituals known in literature as "mummers' plays" (Helm 1981 [1969]) shows us a complex and also heterogeneous landscape. Moving forward with little experience on this topic, I have been amazed since the beginning of this research by the richness of symbols and manifestations these rituals display in the Romanian postsocialist society. All this has become visible not only in rural areas, but also in the urban world and on television screens in various entertainment TV shows broadcasted by the end of the year. In a relatively recently urbanized and modernized society such as Romania, the mummers' tradition is still strongly anchored in the consciousness of many Romanians who have recently settled in the cities. In this context, the incursions of the mummers' teams into the urban area are a way for the poor rural inhabitants of a society overwhelmed by unrest, corruption, poverty, and economic marauding, to earn some money at the end of the year.

At the same time, national and local televisions also exploit the mumming tradition, presenting it through the filter of a nationalist-romantic Folkloristics that regards these forms of culture as surviving elements of ancient times, witnessing the "continuity and autochthony of the Romanian people on the geographical territory between the Danube River, the Carpathian Arch and the Prut River " (Neagota 2000). In addition to the whole experience of the first fieldwork days, memories from the researcher's own childhood spent in a small industrial city in the center of the country, were overlapping. On the streets of the industrial town, mummers were present throughout the winter holidays during Communism, and this image complicated even more the already complex, yet heterogeneous picture of the first days of field research. All these could not only be considered the sum of representations acquired by the researcher during the first days of research, but could also create the sometimes extremely confusing horizon doubled by a poor understanding that many Romanians had regarding this phenomenon.

The systematic analysis of these realities immediately leads the researcher in the rural world - a world dominated by recent transformations and challenges that actually involves the entire peasantry, even in the most ruralized areas of Romania such as those in the region of Moldova. Focusing the research lens on two rural localities, Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, the resulting study would have had the chance to be one of micro-history (Ginzburg 1993), if it had taken place seven or eight decades ago, when rural customary communities were still

very cohesive. The reason is that the recent history of these communities, as well as the cultural micro-ecosystems that had produced them could be understood through the intensive investigation of a well-defined smaller unit such as the mummers' plays. Without completely putting aside this perspective of micro-history studies (Ginzburg 1983), as well as of the anthropology of village communities (Stirling 1965), we could not ignore the ongoing processes Romanian peasantry goes through today. That is why, by analyzing certain rituals in the mummers' play category, we approached them from the point of view of the stringent realities of today's rural world: demographic decline, labor migration to Western European countries, social inequalities, insidious mass-media intrusions in local practices, and the high degree of ritual violence resulting from these external influences.

The inquiry into the complexity of mummers' plays was made from two perspectives. Firstly, these rituals were regarded as a lens through which the whole series of realities of the rural universe could be understood and analyzed. Secondly, the analysis of the Romanian peasantry and of its transformations has also led the research towards mummers' plays, whose practice was in turn influenced by these macro-processes. Along with the whole rural world, mummers' plays are caught in the torrent of socio-economic transformations generated after the fall of communism in Romania and including the emergence of the market economy, the demographic decline, the labor migration and the rise of high social inequalities.

Indeed, the economic transformations of the Romanian rural society were an important subject of analysis highlighted throughout the research. However, the main direction followed by the research was the analysis of the peasants' value system. Kluckhohn observed that this system of values is "a standard which had some persistence through time and organizes a system of action... and places things, acts, ways of behaving, goal of action on the approval-disapproval continuum" (Kluckhohn 1951:395). From an axiological point of view, this research angle proved to be beneficial for understanding mummers' plays. The reason is that the rituals in this category contain information, symbols, terms and ideas from historical periods when the peasantry and the rural universe were quite different than nowadays, and thus open a window onto that world and its system of values. A hermeneutical approach of this information coming from old texts that mention mummers' plays in the area of Moldova, of the poems and the sketches that mummers perform, reveals an archaic world where human life unfolded different from today, between the borders of a sole rural locality having its own rules, principles and values.

Because of this seemingly simple fact, mummers' plays were answers to community issues related to everyday life, involving important universal themes such as courting, marriage, rivalry, reciprocity, love, disease and death. In fact, in rural localities where these rituals have remained very active and vivid even today, such as Heleşteni and Ruginoasa, mummers' plays are ways of organizing social life within the rural community, as well as complex means of communicating between members of the rural communities.

All of this has been confirmed through discussions with the participants in the rituals. Observations on the actions that take place during these rituals also revealed a vibrant and vivid universe, a dense network of social relationships and interactions that shaped the life of the rural community. This complex universe also puts into play a whole range of feelings, expressions, and social behaviors that stand for the complexity of human life in rural communities. However, this elaborate landscape is far from the representations of romantic inspiration of the nationalist rhetoric, in which peasants were portrayed from a Rousseauian perspective as noble savages (Rousseau 2016) incarnating only positive qualities such as hospitality, humanity, and diligence. Other aspects of the humans, such as the propensity to violent solutions to conflicts between people, avarice, pride, cupidity, or the desire to get into the spotlight at all costs, have hardly been mentioned by the approaches that belong to this direction of study and analysis. Nevertheless, rituals such as the *Battle with Clubs* in Ruginoasa and *Pantomimic Mummers* in Heleşteni highlighted a different picture of peasants, their societies and their system of values.

If all this was highlighted in the second and third chapter of this paper, in Chapter four I tried to give the reader a glimpse of the rural universe in which mummers' plays appeared and were socially transmitted for generations. For this, I quoted extensive excerpts from the works of well-known writers describing peasants' lives and mummers' plays in rural communities at a time when their village communities were more cohesive and less connected to the 'open universe' outside the 'closed world' (Bourdieu 2008) of their small localities. The research in Heleşteni, a community that was geographically more isolated and at the same time more cohesive, provided me with the basis for an effective analysis from the point of view of the rural system of values. By embracing this approach, I tried to conduct my analysis less by following the peasants' statements during the interviews, and rather by following the peasants' system of values that would become apparent in the midst of unexpected situations, local expressions and current attitudes of everyday life. I circumscribed well this kind of endeavor by using Geertz's phrase of "looking over people's

shoulders" which meant looking beyond what people say and explicitly do, towards a deeper horizon, guided by the peasants' values. The difficulty of this approach was that the researcher must know well the studied community, a universe "heavy laden with values" (Kluckhohn 1951), and must observe the subtle way in which people's values shape their behaviors and actions.

In order to lead such an analysis, I used the contributions of Robert Hartman and Clyde Kluckhohn, two of the best-known theorists of the value. In relation to their visions, I defined *the value* as a belief, publicly approved, in ways of actions and behaviors, based on the definitions people have in their minds. Observations on how people make valuation have demonstrated that mummies' play is not a kind of "social order reverse", as has often been stated (Kligman 1981). These valorizations show that mummies' plays are guided by firm rules and principles that speak about the values of the social and economic universe in which the rituals were born. That is why a careful scrutiny of mummies' plays over time could become a history of those specific localities, a history that is little known so far, yet one that means, for a large part of the inhabitants of this planet - the small-scale agricultural workers, more than all the events considered crucial for the "accepted version" of world history of humans. Borrowing Eric Wolf's metaphor, I referred to peasants as "people without history" not because they were "the people to whom history was denied," but because their lives in their village communities have been little known and studied by "people who claimed history as their own" (Wolf 1990 [1982]:23).

This perspective on rural communities could bring about criticism and especially accusations that it denies the great historical processes on the European continent - in fact, those events that led to a series of discoveries and innovations that later underpinned the Industrial Revolution. These arguments could be countered by the fact that the subjects I described were also part of a series of interconnected processes, changes and challenges happening at the micro-level of their small rural localities, instead of taking place within the intercontinental movements of populations and goods. But most of these people were not educated at school and remained illiterate, and they have never had the chance to see either the whole picture of the empire, country or continent they were part of, or that chunk of history within which they were significant through their work and presence. By adopting this point of view, I maintain myself far from the intention of romanticizing the peasant's figure as gentle and peaceful, living in communities where human life was *hard* and *simple*, yet protected from the challenges and corrosiveness of modern society.

On the contrary, it is precisely the research on mummers' plays that shows how the life of the individual in these rural communities was sometimes overwhelmed by the excessive pressure of rules that were very often burdensome for the people. Still, we can observe the peasant's humanity exactly in this context. Through the aesthetic feelings involved in mummers' plays, they are able to create those breaches through which rural communities could transgress the immanence of the everyday world with all its burdensome problems, anxieties, and tensions. The human spirit's tendency to escape, at least temporarily, when faced with the burdensome realities of the moment, was described by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in his discussion of the sublime in *Critique of Power of Judgment*. Unfortunately, this theory has not been exploited at all by cultural anthropology studies, and the link between the peasant world and the Kantian theory of the sublime has never been acknowledged. In fact, peasants have often been devalued and their world has been despised by outsiders, which is why many aspects of peasant society and life have been ignored.

In Chapter five, this was one of the main themes of the discussion - the way peasantry had been analyzed in social sciences, starting with Karl Marx. Regarding peasants from the Marxist perspective and texts, this time the discussion extends, and the peasant societies are no longer analyzed from the perspective of the cultural micro-ecosystems that gave rise to mummers' plays, but of their relationship with their superordinate classes and the political world preoccupied for decades to solve the *peasantry issue*. From this political and economic perspective, peasant rituals have been too little analyzed. That is why the biggest stake of this chapter was to answer a crucial question in close relation to the so-called *peasantry issue*. If mummers' plays were so important to peasant societies and had been so successful for centuries, how could their quick disappearance during the Industrial Revolution be explained?

To answer this extremely difficult question, I needed to make a double incursion: in the history of the peasantry, and in the history of mummers' plays. Both incursions involved a number of risks and inconveniences. This was especially because the literature approaching them was marked by a great ideological burden. The main theories approaching peasantry since the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Marxism and the neo-Marxist currents that followed, the modern-traditional dualism of Durkheimian inspiration, and European ethnography. All of these currents were reflected at both European and national levels, especially in those countries that had a large peasant population, just when those states aimed at creating modernizing programs and policies.

Marxism was by far the doctrine that influenced most the way politicians, legislators and researchers regarded *the peasantry issue*. Over decades, concepts such as class struggle and mode of production have marked the reflection on peasantry. In the light of this theory, the discussions on peasant class rather aimed on analyzing their ability to fight the superordinate classes that had exploited the peasants over the centuries. Other debates in this sphere focused on predictions about how capital, penetrating the rural world, would affect the peasants' identity and economy, bringing major changes to their subsistence agriculture. On the other hand, the theory of modernization regarded peasants as a retrograde class, trapped in a mentality and guided by principles that opposed the modernization of the state and its institutions. In this view, peasantry hindered modernization and the state's efforts in this direction. Finally, European ethnography, strongly influenced by a nationalism with romantic accents, has often idealized peasantry and its customs, perceiving it as the origin of the European people. From the perspective of this romantic rhetoric, rural traditions were classified into typologies that represented an obvious proof for the promoters of this theory on the existence of the spirit of a nation, on its autochthony and millenary continuity throughout a certain geographic territory.

None of these theories favored the understanding of peasants from the perspective of their aesthetic creations such as mummers' plays. These rituals were left aside to be studied by a small number of thinkers, especially folklorists, philologists, and theater historians. For decades, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to our days, the most important concern of all these researchers was to find the origin of the folk plays regarded as surviving elements of ancient times. This risky enterprise has led these thinkers to comparisons between cultural elements separated by long periods of time and huge geographical distances, and whose filiation was impossible to prove by means of documents. That is why such approaches remained grounded on speculation based on the morphological similarities between today's mummers' plays and those discovered by studying medieval or even ancient literature. This kind of analysis, present in folklore and in the history of theater in many European countries, has been harshly criticized - especially since the late 1960s - by anthropologists with a different view on research methodology. The work of these thinkers classified as survivalists (Glassie 1975:56) was treated with much contempt, and thrown in the garbage bin of history without any regret (see for instance Millington 2002). A deeper analysis of these approaches would have shown huge similarities between the needs and desires of modern humans, and those

belonging to the small agricultural communities that have performed mummers' plays throughout many generations.

Studying carefully these inquiries and the sometimes fascinating comparisons they made between certain folk plays from different areas and historical times, I could observe the incredible spread and the extraordinary popularity of these rituals for European small-scale agricultural workers. These scholars were also those who showed us how, over time, church institutions tried to eliminate the customs they did not understand, considering them to be against the spirit of Christianity and against biblical teachings. As an irony of history, the ecclesiastical interdictions formulated by various church councils and synods were left to speak about mummers' plays in the furthest periods of the European history. The inability to eliminate such practices considered pagan demonstrated once again that the aesthetic needs of the inhabitant of agricultural societies existed even centuries ago, and these rituals were also more than mere theater plays, actually shaping the social relationships within the village communities.

Looking at things from this very large comparative perspective, we discover the apparently simple fact that the most successful theatrical play in the history of mankind does not belong to any well-known playwright, but to anonymous creators in the agricultural communities of Europe. It is the *Dance of the Goat*, a play spread throughout Europe and even beyond its borders, showing that the history of theater should rethink its relation to these early forms of theater that have been so successful for the agricultural populations of the European continent. Approached too often from the perspective of his/her relationship with the work, the peasant as a human type has often been disregarded from an ethnocentric perspective, and there have never been any authors to observe a very simple fact. Working for months in the field and performing a physically exhausting work, the inhabitant of the agricultural societies also needed entertainment and aesthetic pleasure at least for a few days at the end of the year. But this type of entertainment was in close relationship with its social and economic system that was much less complex than the present one. That is why the simple idea of a goat being taken to the fair for sale, falling ill and then miraculously coming back as a result of its master's magic exhortations, has been the most successful play for the humans living in small agricultural communities.

Another kind of criticism against *survivalists* emphasized the fact that they used terms like mummers' plays, folk drama, folk play, rural rituals and folk theater in an indistinct



manner, generating confusion between different genres of cultural manifestations that were essentially different from one another. Starting from the 1970s, a number of thinkers, especially in the field of folklore, have proposed to rethink the concepts that deal with these topics. This research trend has been particularly concerned with finding the right concepts through which mummers' plays could be circumscribed, and the boundaries between ritual, folk theater, mummers' plays and folk drama could be precisely traced. This arid approach also enjoyed a small dose of success, but the contributions in the field remained in a shadow just like the authors classified as survivalists. This was mainly because the rethinking of the conceptual apparatus meant to approach mummers' plays was not accompanied by an effort to change the mental framework through which these forms of culture were analyzed.

More recent works embracing the field methods of Cultural Anthropology have attempted to look at mummers' plays only from the perspective of the ethnographic present, by following the voice of the subjects involved in the practice of these rituals. The premise of this type of research was that customs should not be treated as surviving cultural elements of a distant past that managed to get into the present through a strange interplay of historical circumstances and occurrences. They represent a living present through the constant change of meanings made by the subjects in the process of performing these practices. However, this purely synchronous approach is also likely to fall into various pitfalls. One of these is the use of a series of terms emerged from the overcoat of modern society, when describing the manifestations and behaviors of the mummers. Concepts like *homosexuality*, *gender*, *transvestite*, *civil society*, and *democracy* cannot be used successfully to describe behaviors very similar to those performed by the mummers of Europe's medieval past when such terms did not even exist. Also, it cannot be denied that, through their symbols, lyrics, costumes and masks, mummers' plays embody an old and meaningful history. It is the history of the small rural communities that had created them.

Throughout the history of mummers' plays, as seen through the eyes of thinkers who have approached this issue, there are only few names that have tried to understand these cultural manifestations in relation to the economic, political and social changes of a society over several decades. One of these is Horia Barbu Oprișan, a folklorist who had been following the transformation of these winter rituals along with the changes produced in the Romanian society during the communist period. Most of his works fall within the direction of folklore influenced by nationalism. Nevertheless, he is the author who describes the peasant world in a few remarkable passages, and sees how, with the integration of peasantry into the

sphere of modern industrial society, the characters of these folk dramas also change, along with the morphology of the plays themselves. The master of the goat, a real magician who utters a disenchantment at the head of the dying animal and brings it back to life, turns into a doctor along with the modernization of the Communist era. The doctor shows up with the syringe and brings the animal back to life with this antidote specific to modern medicine (Oprîșan 1981: 245; Oprîșan 1987: 255). Through such observations taken over five decades, from 1930 to 1980, when the Romanian peasantry underwent the most significant changes in its history, Oprîșan confirms the assumptions of 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers like Thomas Ordish who speculated about the magician's transformation into a doctor in English folk dramas, without being able to identify the moment with precision.

Another author whose contributions to the field of mummers' plays were radically different from the previous tradition, is Terry Gunnell, editor of *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (Gunnell 2007b). Through a comparative approach across all northern European countries, Gunnell and his collaborators show that mummers' plays could be identified throughout the entire northern part of Europe. All these works made me observe that the borders of national states do not coincide with the map of the rituals that are rather coextensive with the rural culture of Europe than with the relatively recent national cultures that lie inside the borders of the national states. Gunnell is also the author who perceives mumming as a complex form of communication where performers and spectators interact and have a continuous feedback, unlike in modern plays where spectators are passive subjects (Gunnell 2007a).

Aware of this entire history of mummers - a history full of hesitations and stumbling blocks, I embraced the diachronic-synchronic perspective for my approach. I started from the observation that mummers' plays embody important elements from the past of the customary communities that have been performing and transmitting them for generations. The analysis of mummers' plays in a rural locality means first and foremost an insight into the past of that locality and a revelation of the way people interact with each other, strive to find solutions to current life problems, and organize their community life. The genealogical method I followed was doubled by the understanding of mummers in relation to the literature on plays and games. Wittgenstein, Couliano, and Huizinga were authors whose theories I related to mummers' plays. All these parallels have shown that mummers' plays, as compelling collective rituals of peasant societies, express a stronger relationship with the deep resorts of human beings than most of the thinkers analyzing the subject had imagined. This explains

their enormous success over a very long period of time when most of Europe's inhabitants were involved in small-scale agricultural work, and the influence of the states where they lived on their local rural communities was extremely low (Robb 2007).

An insight into this history shows that the disappearance of mummers' plays in many parts of Europe along with the Industrial Revolution was the result of a profound mutation. What disappeared as a result of the changes inflicted by the Industrial Revolution were the mummers in agricultural communities, but not the human propensity for play and games. This is because rural customary communities and the system of relations within them gradually dissolved with the emergence of national states. At the same time, the way people related to each other through the unwritten rules of their own communities, within a culture of carnival and ludic, also vanished (Bakhtin 1984 [1968], Huizinga 1968 [1938]). Nevertheless, human propensity for play and game has remained the same. This is because the human mind did not change much in such a short period of time, although that period was accompanied by major economic, political and social transformations (Couliano 1992).

With these transformations, rural communities could give up the community memory they kept alive through oral culture. The education system, national state institutions, and the new type of economic system based on profit and efficiency imposed by the Industrial Revolution, progressively replaced those forms of culture and local social interactions that had the task of responding to certain human problems in small agricultural communities. In this context, mummers were gradually replaced by other forms of entertainment made possible by means of an economic and social system that was more complex and wider than the one creating mummers' plays. The spread of mass sports, commercial competitions (Huizinga 1968 [1938]), and then television (Bruckner 2007 [1995]:69), computer and video games (Sartori 2005 [1997]:17-21) eliminated mummers in agricultural societies, but they all became a tangible evidence that mummers still lurk in people's minds.

Just like mummers' plays, many of the modern sports involve a high degree of violence that makes them so successful to the general public. Additionally, the complicated set of rituals of many sport competitions still remains a basic characteristic of them. The absurd scenarios of mummers' plays and their favorite topics - sexuality, death, illness and the fight between good and evil - were also taken over by video games. All this shows how the attributes of mummers' plays have been integrated into modern expressions, and finally mummers' plays have volatilized in the new environment created by the Industrial

Revolution. However, this dissipation did not happen similarly in all corners of Europe, especially because modernization did not occur at the same speed and in the same way across Europe. Western European countries experienced these changes much earlier, while countries in Eastern Europe such as Romania and Ukraine were touched by them much later. That is why in certain regions of these countries, the customary village communities managed to survive even in recent times, preserving the culture of mummers' plays within them.

The mass disappearance of these forms of culture has drawn the attention of folklorists since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the programs of patrimonialization of these rituals threatened by extinction were a consequence of these observations. However, the Romanian school of ethnology and folklore - the one that had to deal with the safeguarding of such forms of culture - has been marked since its inception by biased political visions and sometimes by political agendas accompanying the scientific exercise of patrimonialization. The intentions of patrimonializing peasant creations have been closely connected to the construction of the unitary national state – just another project with a heavy ideological load. For this reason, mummers' plays and other peasant cultural forms have been the subject of appropriation attempts by the states' policies through state ideology - a process that went hand in hand with the emancipation of peasants and the transformation of their communal identities into one national identity. This was a political-ideological exercise that has progressively led to the peasants' dispossession of their own culture and identity while the museification of their oral creation through folklore festivals has been one of the most widespread processes that took place.

The type of patrimonialization through folklore festivals began to spread in Romania during the reign of King Ferdinand I (1914-1927) and it grew during Carol II (1930-1940). King Carol II was also the one who used peasant culture and the patrimonial activities of Dimitrie Gusti's sociological school as a symbolic weapon against a rival and reactionary political movement - the Iron Guard (Momoc 2012).

However, the brutal interference of state politics in patrimonial activities became apparent only after Communism came to power in 1945. The Communist regime set up the *Amateur Artist Movement* soon after it came to power. Through this movement, it attempted to control the spontaneous folk creation in the rural world, and to limit the freedom of expression of the rural community members. They made it compulsory for all mummers' teams to obtain certificates issued by township halls. In its relation to folk creation, the

ensorship of autonomous cultural activities in the country represented the main principle of Communist power during the first decades of the regime. Through this, the Communist state tried to appropriate all cultural activities that could escape its vigilant eye.

With Ceaușescu's coming to power, an important element in the relationship between political power and folklore appeared. At that time, the ideological interest for rural folklore had reached its peak. This was because Ceaușescu's neopatrimonial regime was marked by the attempt to impose the nationalist-communist doctrine. In it, symbolic elements were taken from peasant folklore, and first used in shaping the relationship between the leader and the popular masses, and later in constructing the personality cult of the Romanian Communist dictator. All this happened in three stages. First, the control of folk creations was perfected through the *Amateur Artist Movement*. Then, after 1967, folklore festivals were organized during the official visits of the communist delegations to various places in the country, but also at predetermined dates, especially by the end of the year. Beginning with July 1971 and the elaboration of so-called *July Theses*, the control of the entire cultural fields became drastic. All cultural fields were forced to adopt folkloric themes in order to pass the communist censorship that had become unbearable. More than ever, the danger represented by the folklorization of the entire Romanian culture seemed unavoidable.

The process of politicization of all cultural fields culminated with the establishment of the National Festival *Cântarea României/Song of Praise to Romania* launched by the end of 1976. Through this national festival, monstrous in its dimension and expression, the cult of the personality of the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu reached paroxysm. This was also reflected in the transformation of local rituals meant to be performed on the festival scene, including the *Dance of the Deer*. Folk actors had to quickly change their repertoire so that they could meet the new demands imposed by the stage, but also by the ideological requirements of the Communist Party. In time, these changes imposed from above were taken over by the performers caroling through the village, and those specific changes were perpetuated, embraced by the generations that followed the customs. Besides all this, mummers' plays were presented by communist propaganda in various journals such as *Romania* or magazines like *România Pitorească/Picturesque Romania*. The strategy was meant to support and promote the myth of the Romanian people's autochthony on the territory of today's Romania.

In Ceaușescu's Romania, folklore was used until the end as an instrument of propaganda and a bulwark built by the communist-nationalist ideology to mediate relations between the leader and the masses. The use of folklore for political interests was a constant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as various states with very different political orientations adopted it to forge a symbolic image of their own nation (Dorson 1966). Once again, mummies' plays suffered under the harshness of time, forced to serve the ideological objectives of a totalitarian state rather than to benefit from a safeguarding model revolving around the community and its needs.

The last chapter of my dissertation is an attempt to synthesize all the topics developed throughout this work, focusing in particular on postsocialist patrimonial activities, and on the unprecedented development of local, national and international folklore festivals where the teams from the localities I studied participated.

This ample discussion began with the analysis of the bombastic thesis of historian Eric Hobsbawm regarding the death of peasantry at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - a short century, according to the same work (Hobsbawm 1994). Implicitly, the death of peasantry would immediately result in the death of rituals, along with all the other aesthetic expressions practiced by the peasants. However, Hobsbawm's rough thesis was resumed and nuanced in the coming years by various scholars. The most widespread concept in rural studies is that of depeasantization, a term that has been extensively analyzed by authors such as Araghi, Akram-Lodhi, Kay, Van Der Ploeg, Kearney, and Bryceson. The most frequent argument of all these studies is that the process of depeasantization is not the equivalent of a removal of peasantry from the global scene, but rather of its transformation from a class involved in subsistence agricultural labor into a *new peasantry* for which labor migration, the practice of a paid job in the city, and agricultural work are intertwined and become economic strategies in the global economy. Also, the struggle between the *new peasantry* and the corporate and institutional entities trying to limit its access to basic resources is also becoming a constant in the era of globalization, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ploeg 2009).

To this entire discussion, the present study provides a new perspective. What disappears is not the peasantry as class, but the customary communities based on a particular system of values. Mummies' plays and other peasant rituals through which these provided a response to current problems of the communities, and that also represented a complex way of organizing rural communities, became severely threatened by extinction in the landscape of

globalization, based on another economic logic governed by market economy, profit, and efficiency. All this is happening in the context of the volatilization of the system of values that made it possible for small peasant communities to exist across Europe. These processes, happening at a higher pace in Europe and America, are gradually becoming more visible on other continents with a large peasantry such as Asia, Africa and Latin America (Bryceson, Kay, and Mooij 2000).

In the context of the great transformations the rural world goes through, countries and areas with a large peasantry experience all of these more intensely. Eastern Europe and Romania in particular have become the place where such processes may be very well observed. If, already in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Robert Redfield observed a number of changes in the peasants' system of values in Mexico, Katherine Verdery and Katy Fox found the best place to identify these transformations in Romania at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The restless postsocialist world witnessing the transition from a centralized economy to a market economy, the promulgation of Law 18/1991 on the restitution of farmland to peasants, the rise of large agricultural corporations on the Romanian market, and the European Union legislation regarding the production and marketing of agricultural products, became a torrent that affected the way of being and the lifestyle of peasantry in Romania. While Verdery and Fox focused their attention especially on the economic and legislative changes, and on the way they transformed the peasants' system of values, my research focused especially on the labor migration of peasants to Western European countries and on the way this has later been reflected in the practice and transmission of mummings' plays.

Although most often absent from his rural community, the emigrant peasant has become a continuous *invisible presence* in the Romanian rural universe. The links between labor migrants and those left at home - by phone, Skype, WhatsApp and Facebook - brought to the village not only the image of the emigrants, but also their stories about Western Europe. Through all these, peasants have found out that the values in which they were educated and raised were relative and that, beyond the borders of their village and of Romania, there is a world where people guide their behavior according to other moral principles and values. All these stories, transformed into an information that flows rapidly in the world of rural communities - through village gossip - exerted a growing pressure on those who had decided to remain in the village and go on practicing subsistence agriculture.

At a first glance, the close follow-up of few emigrants and of their life history seems to lead the research towards a banal landscape where poverty, lack of jobs and the economic stagnation of a region become the causes of migration. A closer look at these stories, however, reveals the deep feelings, the disappointments, the entanglements and the plethora of problems faced by labor migrants when embracing the path of migration. Being away from their country, the world of the home village and winter rituals like mummers' plays become a magnet that constantly attracts them back to their native village. Thus, such emigrants acquire a transnational identity, always caught between two or more worlds, condemned to travel ceaselessly between them, and being left without the possibility of finding themselves completely without this permanent move. In turn, this transnational movement opens even more the gates of the world of small rural communities towards horizons these worlds have not known in the past.

All this leads to consequences with sometimes unforeseen effects for the village world. Older people in particular - with a lower ability to adapt to the challenges of the present world, and more rooted in the moral principles and values in which they grew up to become the individuals they are - instinctively seek that cohesive community where they used to live during their childhood and youth. Embracing new Christian cults such as Pentecostalism, Gospel Christians, or Jehovah's Witnesses, they try to find those stricter principles and values that are progressively dissipating along with the volatilization of village customary communities. Paradoxically, these decisions have weakened even more the customary communities of the villages. This is because, for religious reasons, the members of these non-Protestant Christian cults do not perform winter rituals anymore; they do not even welcome caroling teams such as the *Dance of the Goat*, the *Dance of the Deer*, and the *Pantomimic Mummers*. While some villagers, especially the elders, are embracing this path, young people develop aspirations in close relation with modern society and the opportunities it offers.

The two events (photo elicitation and essay writing) implemented during the summer of 2012 in two schools of Heleşteni showed that young pupils know well both the potential benefits and the risks of migration, while also being aware of the benefits of having a university degree. This does not mean that they are not spiritually linked to the cultural heritage of their village, which they promise to promote even if their destiny would lead their lives far from the boundaries of the home village. These tendencies, affecting both the elderly and the young, become torrents that undermine the peasants' system of values day by day,



and seem to seal the fate of mummers' plays on the long run. Against such trends, the patrimonialization programs could be the only alternative for preserving these elements of peasant culture in the future.

In fact, the decline of the winter rituals of the peasants and the impossibility of maintaining them without the involvement of local authorities has also been observed by the villagers themselves. What we are dealing with is, in fact, a transition of these cultural forms from community rituals to forms of intangible cultural heritage perpetuated and maintained only through the involvement of state institutions. This distinction has not only been observed by the peasants themselves, but also by many heritage studies specialists. They have noticed that the patrimonial processes often lead to the creation of cultural forms that are very different from the culture that had been targeted by the safeguarding process. In fact, the safeguarding actions implemented through state institutions involve power relations, the desire to acquire symbolic capital, economic and political interests. In many cases, all of these undermine the patrimonialization processes designed to safeguard those cultural forms threatened by extinction.

Especially in Romania, the institutions designated to conduct these safeguarding actions are inheritors of the institutional and cultural assets of the patrimonial processes during the Communist dictatorship and especially during the period of construction of Ceaușescu's personality cult. Consequently, folklore festivals continued to be the basic form of rural culture safeguarding processes. Not only have they continued a tradition inherited from communism, but they have also known a real expansion in recent years, especially under the influence of local and national televisions that used to broadcast reports of such events every year. In many of these folklore festivals, one could notice the tendency of museification of rural culture, often accompanied by the myth of the autochthony and permanence of the Romanian people on today's geographic territory of Romania. Customs such as *mummers' plays*, always present in these festivals, were perceived by the promoters of nationalism, as indisputable proofs of this autochthony. This topic, together with the type of speech heavily present during the period of the Ceaușescu's communist nationalism, have reappeared in postsocialist times, finding their most fertile ground in local and national folklore festivals.

A close observation of these festivals reveals a bicephalous tendency present at their very core. Whereas some teams want to present a ritual onstage as it used to be performed by

members of the village community, others want to impress spectators and the jury at all costs in order to obtain the prize and the symbolic capital, by getting to the forefront of these competitions. For this purpose, they merge symbols and themes taken from rural folklore into a kind of cultural form that has never existed in the villages the respective teams come from. The tension between promoting authenticity and inventing new traditions just for the sake of the stage marks all such folk festivals at the end of the year.

Three important processes accompany this kind of patrimonialization: *festivalization*, *urbanization*, and *mass-mediatizing*. Through these three processes, rural rituals leave the world of villages where they emerged, and take the roads of cities. Moreover, through local and national televisions, they even reach the homes of the spectators. The viewers, most of whom are peasants proletarianized during the communist period, often see these forms of culture as an oasis of authenticity and a pillar of stability in a society fallen into agitation, tension, and unrest. Just like humans, *mummers' plays* migrate to urban areas, where the possibilities of self-assertion are higher than in the rural world. However, the television broadcasting of rural folklore festivals brings about more consequences. One of them is that people, especially the poorest ones, sometimes come into contact with their own traditions through the TV screens rather than directly, as before. Additionally, in some depopulated villages, the efforts and human staff needed to set the teams participating in folklore festivals drain the rural world of the human resources that could have been used to perform and transmit the rituals that peasant communities had managed to maintain until that moment. The phenomenon was also observed by certain villagers who raised a critical voice against such trends. However, the influence of the mass media and of the modernized and computerized society on rural communities is extremely strong. Asked to choose between the fascinating worlds that come via iPhones and *mummers' plays*, even the most passionate performers of the village rituals seem to give up mummers in favor of computer games and the internet.

With the success of folklore festivals, the human, material and logistic resources involved in their realization grow. The most successful such festivals have become international, opening their gates not only to teams in the country, but also to those from abroad. Starting with 2016, the *Deer team* of Heleşteni participated for the first time in an international folklore festival outside Romania. It was the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca in Cernăuți*. By participating, a ritual such as the *Dance of*

*the Deer*, born in a small rural locality, became transnational, passing not only the boundaries of the village where it has been created, but also the borders of its own country of origin.

Accompanying Heleşteni's *Deer team* in its journey to Ukraine, I did not know that I would discover a new and fascinating world, that of *mummers' plays* in the North Bucovina region. Just like folk plays in the Romanian villages I studied, those from the Ukrainian *comune* I visited represent answers people gave to problems specific to their own rural communities, including marriage, death, illness and aesthetic needs. But, besides all this, in southern Ukraine *mummers' plays* also represented a mark of Romanian ethnic identity in the political climate of the Soviet dictatorship. During Stalinist times and the subsequent years, the performers of these rituals were often severely punished for organizing and practicing them. Thus, the political influence on the folk plays became particularly stringent in southern Ukraine. Therefore, the history of these customs in the region speaks about periods of brutal coercion, but also about more liberal times, such as those of the Gorbachev perestroika.

The brutal interference of the political factor in the life of rural communities in southern Ukraine has made performers of *mummers' plays* in the area develop an open suspicion against official policies and political ideology. That's why patrimonialization activities through folklore festivals, such as the one in Cernăuți, are severely criticized by performers. Resistance to official policies is constant in the discourse of the folk plays' performers. Performers of rural rituals such as *Malanca* make a clear distinction between the ritual in the village and the one exported somewhat illicitly, through the influence of the political factor, outside the boundaries of the community, to the stages of folklore festivals. According to members of the rural community, the feelings and energy experienced during the days when these rituals take place go beyond common everyday experiences because they create an invisible chain uniting all those who have ever performed these customs within the boundaries of the community. That is why all these experiences are irreproducible and can never be recreated beyond the boundaries of the rural community performing and conveying them from generation to generation.

Such a vision on the *Malanca* ritual cannot, however, stop the insidious incursions of journalists for whom these rural rituals have become exotic attractions, especially because of their rarity now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through ad hoc reports, rural winter rituals are teleported from the villages of Northern Bucovina directly to the screens of local and national televisions in Ukraine, and their performers sometimes find themselves

involuntarily in a position to respond to a series of increasing demands from the press. All of this creates situations and events that ritual practitioners had not anticipated, and that did not belong to ritual morphology in the past. The discovery of the true spirit of *mummers' plays* could only happen with patience, a step by step follow of the ritual's unfolding stages and of the meanings that practitioners give them on the spot, especially after night falls, when the darkness outside makes the scenes unattractive to field reporters.

A genuine interest in rural culture and its rituals would be the equivalent of understanding peasant values and the type of behaviors accepted by rural communities during holidays around the New Year. However, the arrival of two teams of mummers from Romania in the very day of the New Year, and their journey through several Ukrainian *comune*, was just trying to express all this by recreating an authentic fragment of the winter holidays in village communities. This patrimonial action transformed two of the mummers' rituals (Heleşteni's *Dance of the Deer* and Mălini's *Dance of the Goat*) into transnational forms of culture. However, the framework in which this type of patrimonial actions took place was closely related to local practices and traditions, which is why the performances were also appreciated by the members of the rural communities where they took place.

Unlike such actions in the rural area, the *International Festival of Cultural Traditions - Bucovina's Malanca* in Cernăuți taking place the following day, was rather a *touristicization* and an *exoticization* of peasant rituals. The festival fit within the frames of the concept launched half a century ago by Horkheimer and Adorno - that of *cultural industry*. From the perspective of this concept, one could see how cultural consumption in the name of economic profit prevails over the genuine interest for the rural world and its deteriorating practices.

Once again, it is the same type of symbolic violence described by Bourdieu, accomplished by means of subordinating the people and their culture, paradoxically enough, through their very active involvement in the process making them beneficial for more powerful economic actors. This exoticization, together with the cannibalization of rural culture through photo cameras and then through social networking, was also observed by members of the *Deer team* in Heleşteni. It is an assault conducted by the social actors of the cultural industry, directed against peasant rituals, transposed onstage, yet becoming at the same time more invisible than before. This is because mummers are no longer the peasants' answers to problems inherent in their communities, nor the "story(s) people tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1972); instead, they are a sum of representations destined to a fast

and easy cultural consumption. The whole history of mummers' plays in the Northern Bucovina area and the mummers' waggish way of confronting the vicissitudes of history remain unknown to capitalist public lovers of "rural flavors."

Globalization has brought a whole series of negative effects that impacted rural culture. These include the devaluation of peasants and of their culture. The process goes hand in hand with the promotion of cultural elements belonging to them on the stages of folklore festivals. Paradoxically, through this museification and touristification of the declining rural culture, the values and principles underlying it become more invisible than before. It is an invisibility fabricated, as Van der Ploeg noticed, by those entities that over time have led to the subordination of peasants and the repudiation of their interests in land, water, small-scale agricultural work and, last but not least, in their own culture (Ploeg 2009). Nevertheless, all this does not necessarily imply the death of the peasantry. With globalization, the old peasantry has dissipated through economic migration and dislocation; as a result, we now have peasants scattered across all the major urban centers of the world.

Over the last two decades, through Internet and global communication networks, peasants have been organized into a number of organizations currently counting millions of members. At the same time, the patrimonialization of rural culture through the online medium has begun to take on increasing momentum, creating growing virtual communities interested in promoting rural culture globally. But more than anything, those who had lived in peasant culture and performed its rituals, including *mummers' plays*, are now scattered all over the planet, promoting this whole culture through their life stories, in the most unexpected places and situations. In a globalizing culture, the story, companion of human life for millennia, has become a new form of the patrimonialization of rural culture and, implicitly, of *mummers' plays*.

The entire history presented in the pages of this study was an attempt to portray, through *mummers' plays*, the way in which rural communities have changed under the influence of the processes engendered by the industrial revolution. For the individual of rural communities in Europe, *mummers' plays* have long been a response to the challenges of a life lived mostly within the boundaries of a rural locality dominated by local rules and values. That is why a classification of all forms and expressions of folk plays is impossible to achieve, especially because the diversity of the rural communities in Europe was simply incredible a century ago, and their members' responses to the challenges of life inside the

small rural communities were also extremely diverse. From this wide range of cultural expressions, a fact seems to remain constant. For peasants, *mummers' plays* remained landmarks in both community and individual memory, remarkable moments breaking long periods of time that were relatively tedious and dull, dominated by agricultural work. In interviews with today's octogenarian peasants, many of them could reconstruct the history of their own rural community, or even their own life according to the important events taking place in the ritual period of the New Year. Last but not least, *mummers' plays* were ways through which rural communities were able to temporarily transgress the immanence of the everyday world and all its problems, anxieties and tensions.

The Industrial Revolution interrupted this way of being and of relating to reality. Forced to leave their communities, peasants became peasant workers, industrial workers and townspeople. The press, the radio, the television and then the computer connected to the internet replaced the collective memory (Halbwachs 1992 [1950]) of rural communities. But the process did not have the same speed and intensity all over Europe. That is why we still have places like eastern Romania and southern Ukraine, with cohesive rural cultures, and industrialized countries like England and northern European countries where peasantry has almost disappeared. Here, *mummers* first adapted to the working class culture, adopting the values and demands of a culture different from the rural one, but still cohesive and community-oriented. Later, they disappeared progressively, replaced by the emergence of sports competitions, television and, finally, Internet and computer games - all expressions of modern civilization. But the spread of *mummers' plays* practically across the whole Europe shows that rural culture is a constant element of the entire European culture. This could have attracted the attention of those researchers who wanted to find Europe's common cultural roots (Geremek 1996) and the cultural conditions of the European Union's solidarity (Michalski 2006). The fact that peasant culture has not been mentioned among the common cultural elements of Europe speaks, once again, about the process of marginalization and stigmatization of this social class and of its economic and cultural products.

For a long time, *mummers' plays* have been viewed from the perspective of the social evolution theory, as surviving cultural elements of a distant past. It was this perspective that prompted many of the thinkers of this school of thought to seek the origin of *mummers* in times and places other than the societies where these rituals were still vivid and active. This kind of analysis has become visible throughout European folklore, from England to Eastern Europe, and has perpetuated in various forms even in current research (Oişteanu 2012). In

contrast to such a discourse, recent years have witnessed researches that regarded mummers only as a manifestation of the ethnographic present, an expression of events and phenomena strictly related to contemporary society (Creed 2011). In my opinion, the two currents are equally incapable of providing eloquent answers meant to clarify the understanding of *mummers' plays*.

*Mummers' plays* were expressions of the public space of rural communities, if one may say so, involving a more complex set of relationships between the individual and the members of the village community with whom relations were scarcer during the year. Therefore, from this point of view, the rituals were forms of communication at a level wider than the relatively limited level of the nuclear family and the extended one. That is why *mummers' plays* have always been closely linked to the present and to its challenges, while being in constant connection to the past of the community, and serving as landmarks for the collective memory of the community and its people. Humans are not just beings with primary needs and whose life is strictly linked to solving the needs of the present. They are at the same time a living history, a history of social facts incarnated in animal bodies, but bodies of political animals (Aristotle 2013[349 B.C.]:14). The past is an important part of the social and individual life, so memory is an essential faculty of social communities and of the people belonging to them. It is memory that may give meaning to the present under various circumstances and in different contexts.

For centuries, the history of rural communities in Europe has been an orally transmitted history; it has been a history of a social life lived between the borders of a small locality and reproduced through the collective memory of the village community. This is the history of *mummers' plays*, too, a history unknown and little studied so far. The overlook of this history has a clear explanation that speaks about a well-established Eurocentrism. Today, the history of Europe is viewed predominantly through the great geographic discoveries, the great technological discoveries that led to the Industrial Revolution, or the great territorial conquests during the colonial period. Europe is rather perceived as a cradle of modern civilization than as the place where, a mere century ago, most of the continent's inhabitants were involved in small-scale farming, performing pagan rites to gain the confidence of malevolent spirits (Lecouteux 2015), lived in insulated villages dominated by unwritten rules (Robb 2008), and during winter holidays wore the masks and the costumes of the mummers in a sort of collective celebration attended by every soul in the locality.

Unfortunately, the history of the research on *mummers' plays* is not revealing in this respect and tells us too little about the unfolding of these rituals in time and even less about the people who performed them, the needs and problems of their everyday lives. Many of the scholars who studied folk plays got seduced by mummers' masks and costumes and could not see behind them. That is why some of them saw in *mummers' plays* only several surviving cultural forms of eras long gone; meanwhile, others regarded them as modernity in premodern drag. With this research, I tried to see beyond the charming masks of mummers. There, I saw human beings and their attempts to respond to problems of the world they lived in, including capital shortages, social inequalities, the challenges of a new economic and social system, as well as universal human problems like illness, death, eroticism, pride, identity, marriage, and love. Therefore, the study of *mummers' plays* should not end with a conclusion about peasants and mummers, but with one about human beings.

When seeing the peasants in Heleşteni happy to welcome mummers; when seeing the poor youngsters of Ruginoasa struggling for self-assertion at all costs by means of a fight that could cripple them for life; when seeing the craftsmen of Heleşteni working scrupulously and diligently to create flawless masks; when seeing Alin embracing the mask inherited from his father who was gone too soon; when seeing Mr. Michi Balcan with tears in his eyes at the sight of the *Malanca* team visiting him; when seeing the Hâra family troubled by the fact that they did not have the chance to welcome the late mummers' team; when seeing Gheorghe of Crasna with his face illuminated by the joyful understanding of how *Malanca* was going to take him to the immortal universe of his community's *Malanca performers/Malancari*... That moment, I saw the human being surrounded by daily worries, and not peasants or mummers. The human, meant to be the subject of all Cultural Anthropology studies, yet gradually beginning to be replaced by a series of concepts such as class, gender, race, exploitation, civil society, democracy, etc.

Today, there are thousands of anthropological studies that start from the analysis of such concepts and theories, and end up with general conclusions about the same concepts and theories, forgetting to mention the HUMAN, with little passions, hopes, needs, aspirations, problems and daily worries, but also with the great existential dilemmas related to life, illness, freedom, love, violence and death. *Mummers' plays* and peasants were the main concepts of the present study, but they should finally be just pretexts for a deeper understanding of humans and of their great existential dilemmas revealed by social life, whether it is led between the borders of small agricultural communities, or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century



globalized society. By understanding these aspects, we should now abandon the concepts that have accompanied us all along, and take a look beyond them. Following Wittgenstein, we could say that they were just a ladder we can throw away once we climb it: "he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it) (Wittgenstein 1922:189)."

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### THE OLDEST HISTORIC ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS REGARDING HELEȘTENI-RUGINOASA AREA

The first document regarding Heleșteni-Ruginoasa area I could find in the archives was an act of donation issued on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1401 and showing how the king himself and his brother Bogdan, gave Plotunești village from the Strunga *comună* to the nobleman Plotun “who served in just and faithful service”, and also marking the village borders. Most probably back then Plotunești village was no more than a hamlet with few houses, since the village’s name comes, of course, from the name of the nobleman receiving it. In addition, the village boundaries were stated in the document mentioned above: “And the boundaries of the village would be from the cherry tree across the field, then along river Bahlui down to the valley that is slightly below the linden tree, from the valley straight towards *Valea Sârbească* (Serbian Valley), on this valley up to the forest, to the border of Răduleț, from there on the hill, to the edge of the forest, up to Strunga, from Giurgiu then back to the cherry tree. That is the border” (Cihodaru, Caproșu, and Șimanschi 1975).

Thus, in Strunga comună, just a few kilometers away from Heleșteni and Ruginoasa, back in the late fifteenth century, the nephews of the nobleman Bratul Viteaz, named Mircea and Anușca, together with other relatives, sons and daughters of the nobleman Mircea Cașotă, received *ocine*<sup>57</sup>, the entire villages Brătuleștii and Fedeleșani, and more *ocine* at Cârlișăura, Goeștii and Vârstații, through a document issued during the time and on behalf of Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) (1457-1504), namely on January 7, 1491 (Cihodaru, Caproșu, and Ciocan 1980). The two villages, Brătulești and Fedeleșani, still bear the same name and are located within the Strunga *comună*, a locality mentioned in documents long before Heleșteni, Ruginoasa or any of their associated villages. It is said that Brătulești is one of the oldest Moldavian villages, being founded by Bratul Neatedul, mentioned in documents of Roman and Iuga in 1392, 1393, 1395 and 1400 or, more likely, by Bratul Staovici, mentioned in the documents of Alexander the Good, 1400, 1404, 1407, 1408 and 1410 (Bogdan 1913:446). From these documents we learn that the names of the villages from Strunga *comună* come from the names of landowners who owned them during medieval times.

Heleșteni locality, back then known as Hăleștiianii, is mentioned apparently for the first time in a sale document from late 16<sup>th</sup> century, in a document of selling the Obroceni *ocina* (today’s Oboroceni). The document was issued in Hăleștiianii on November 15, 1599 (Iorga 1906:85-86). From the same period, just a few months later, we find a historical document important for the medieval history of the region around Heleșteni. Its value resides in the listing of all the surrounding towns with the names of the noblemen. The document was issued on June 2, 1600 and says that: “Maria and Tatiana, Basil and Dochia, sons of Lazol Pitărel, are giving a house in Obroceni to Nicoară Logofet on plates of silver. Witnesses: Ghiorgie, chief magistrate of Siminiceani, Gligorie diac of Scheia, Ionașcu of Crivești,

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<sup>57</sup> In the Middle Age, the *ocine* were land plots that somebody received, having at the same time the right to pass them on as heritage

Toader and Motoc of Movileani, Calota from Oboroceani, Costin of Hăleştiiani, Irimiia hotnog of Buţcăteani, Frăţilă of Cârjeşti” (Idem 1906:274).

However, a document of real relevance for the origin of Heleşteni’s name is the one issued June 23, 1602 in Iaşi, during the time of Ieremia Movila’s reign (1595-1606). The document is important because it indicates that the Hălăştiiianii locality was received by some boyars who had received it from Manea Sulger and his brother Bălos who had previously gained it from “old Ştefan Voivod<sup>58</sup> for old 500 thalers” and also for the fact that the name of “Nastea, the daughter of Hălăştiiianul” is mentioned (Iorga 1906: 85-86). Perhaps this is the historical character that names the village and hence, the *comună*. Four years later, the Hălăşteeni locality<sup>59</sup>, appears in a deed of sale through which Anghelina Ion Nemiş sells to pan Nicoară their share of Onceşti (called Vascani, a village we find today in Ruginoasa comună) in the area of Roman city. This document of the sale was issued in Hălăşteeni place on April 2, 1606. Its mentioned witnesses are “pan Năvrăpescu” who lived in Oboroceni, as I inferred from other documents (Furtună and Şoimar 2003), and ”Popa Costin from Heleşteni” (Ghibănescu 1908).

Oboroceni (a village we find today in Heleşteni comună) begins to appear in documents before any mention of Heleşteni; to be more precise, this happens on December 31, 1573, in a document issued in Iaşi. Oboroceni is mentioned with the name of Obrocani<sup>60</sup> and the document gives important information regarding the history of the locality: Vaşcan bailiff, grandson of Pătru Copleşcul, sells the *ocina* inherited from him at Obrocani to priest Ştefan and his priestess “for Tatar zlotys” (Iorga 1906:270-271). Thus we find out indirectly that the Obrocani village existed at least three generations prior to issuing this document, which sends us back to its roots 100 years before, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Stephen the Great.

Another document issued in 1612, during the reign of Ştefan Vodă Tomşa II (1611-1615), mentions a slightly different name for Oboroceni – namely Oborociani. In this document, the village name is accompanied by that of a nobleman: “Rugină from Oborociani”. The document talks about a conflict between two aristocratic families for a part of Vascani village which is clearly today’s Vascani found in the area and under the administration of Ruginoasa comună (Ghibănescu 1907). Since 1612 and especially during the next two decades, the documents of the time allow us to discover the name of the nobleman Dumitru Buhuş with interests regarding Ruginoasa-Heleşteni area. Thus, in an old document from the period of

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<sup>58</sup> It refers most probably to Ştefan Tomşa I, ruler between 1563-1564, even though, according to what has been mentioned and other historical data, Ştefan Vodă cel Bătrân is, in fact, Ştefan I who ruled between 1394-1399. This information agrees with the inscription inside Sf. Nicolae Church in Rădăuţi where the two homonyms are used in order to refer to ruler Ştefan I.

<sup>59</sup> In the documents of that time, Heleşteni bears many names, such as: Hăleştiiani, Hălăşteeni, Hăleştiianii, Heleşteleni, etc.; see also Alexandru I. GoŃa, *Documente Privind Istoria României (Documents Concerning the History of Romania)*, Veacurile (Centuries) XIV-XVII, A. Moldova, Indicele Numelor de Locuri, Academiei Române Publishing House, Bucharest, 1990, p.120

<sup>60</sup> In documents of the time, Oboroceni has several names, such as: Obrocani, Oborociani Oboroceani, Obrăceni, etc.; see also GoŃa, Alexandru I., *Documente Privind Istoria României*, Veacurile XIV-XVII, A. Moldova, Indicele Numelor de Locuri, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 1990, p.178. Starting with 1600, more documents mentioning the name of Obroceni (today’s Oboroceni) is quite frequent.

ruler Alexandru Iliș, his estates are being recorded and his right of ownership is confirmed. The document states that in Crivești village (located today in Strunga comună), nobleman Buhuș starts ruling, and extends simultaneously over the fourth part of Movileni, a village situated on the territory of today's Heleșteni. At that time, during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the nobleman Buhuș, without being one of the high court ruling noblemen, managed to have 34 estates in different villages (sometimes comprising even whole villages). Just in the Roman area, Buhuș ruled over six whole villages (Grădiniți, Crivești, Răvăcani, Găureani, Hotecești and Dădești) and two vineyards, three ponds, three mills, a bridge over the river Siret and a quarter of Movileni (a village located today in Heleșteni comună).

## APPENDIX B

### DOCUMENTS FROM DU CANGE'S GLOSSARIUM, MENTIONING THE DANCE OF THE DEER AND THE MUMMERS' PLAYS IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

« Cervula » (par C. Du Cange, 1678), in Du Cange, et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, éd. augm., Niort: L. Favre, 1883-1887, t. 2, col. 277c.

*Cervula, Cervulus, Ludi profani, apud Ethnicos et Paganos: solebant quippe ii Kalendis Januarii belluarum, pecudum, et vetularum assumptis formis huc et illuc discursare, et petulantius sese gerere: quod a Christianis non modo proscriptum, sed et ab iis postmodum inductum constat, ut ea die ad calcandam Gentilium consuetudinem privatæ fierent Litaniae, et jejunaretur, ut observare est ex Concilio Toletano IV. can. 10. S. Isidoro lib. 1. de Offic. Eccles. cap. 40. Concilio Turon. II. can. 17.*

The Deer [Cervula], the Little Stag [Cervulus], profane dance at barbarians / pagans and peasants<sup>61</sup>: indeed, at the calends of January, taking the appearance / shape of wild animals, cattle<sup>62</sup> or old women / old maids, [they used] to run around and to behave rudely / shamelessly / with no shame: it is clear that this thing was not only forbidden by Christians, but they even decided / introduced that in that day, in order to eliminate / suppress the pagans' custom, one should make private litanies and fast, as it turns out / one observes in the Toledo Council...

S. Augustinus Serm. de Tempore 215:

*Si adhuc agnoscatis aliquos illam sordidissimam turpitudinem de hinnula, vel Cervula exercere, ita durissime castigate, ut eos pœniteat rem sacrilegam commisisse.*

If you know other people that perform this sordid and disgusting custom / a spurious and despicable thing that has to do with *the deer (hinnula)* and *the little stag (Cervula)*<sup>63</sup>, scold them harshly so that they repent for committing a sacrilege / they did a unlawful thing.

Vita S. Eligii lib. 2. cap. 15:

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<sup>61</sup> The term *ethnicos* is used for naming ethnic groups, folks, barbarian populations unconverted to Christianity, pagan. The term *paganos* refers to peasants, the rural population that has been superficially christianized and had a deeply syncretic trait.

<sup>62</sup> Here, the term *cattle* is used generically (cf. it. *bestiame*, en. *cattle*), naming both small cattle (sheep, goats) and bovines (cows, oxen).

<sup>63</sup> The two terms, *hinnula* and *Cervula* stand for the mask play, not for the animals.

*Nullus in Kalend. Januarii nefanda et ridiculosa, vetulas, aut Cervulos, aut jotticos faciat.*

Nobody should in the calends of January do spurious and ridiculous things, such as *The Old Women*<sup>64</sup> or *The Little Stags* (Cervulos) or *plays* (*superstitious*).

Concil. Autissiod. can. 1:

*Non licet Kalendis Januarii vetula aut Cervulo facere, vel strenas diabolicas observare, etc.*

It is not permitted at the calends of January to feast with the [custom of] Old Woman / old maid and the Little Stag<sup>65</sup>, nor to keep / respect the custom of the devilish / cursed gifts.

Haltigarius in Pœnitent. cap. 6:

*Si quis in Kalendis Januarii, quod multi faciunt, et in Cervulo ducit, aut in vetula vadit, 3. annos pœniteat.*

If at the calends of January someone, as many do, walks with *The Stag* or behaves as *Old Woman* [in Cervulo ducit, in vetula vadit], he should repent for three years.

Ita apud Commeanum in lib. de mensura pœnitentiarum cap. 7. Burchard. lib. 19. cap. 5:

*Fecisti aliquid tale, quod pagani fecerunt, et adhuc faciunt in Kalendis Januarii in Cervulo et vetula: si fecisti 30. dies in pane et aqua pœniteas.*

Did you do something such as pagans did and still do at the calends of January, with the [play of] the Little Stag and the Old Woman: if you did that, then you should repent for 30 days, with bread and water.

Meminit præterea Cervuli S. Pacianus in Parænesi ad pœnitentiam. Denique S. Ambrosius in Psalm. 41:

*Sed jam satis in exordio tractatus, sicut in principio anni, more vulgi Cervus allusit.*

St. Pacianus then mentions the *Cervulus*, in *Paraenesis*, at the penitence. St. Ambrose also mentions it in Psalm 41:

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<sup>64</sup> The reference is to *Old Women*.

<sup>65</sup> This is a free translation, given the particularity of the syntactic structure „facere + Abl.‟. In other versions of the text, we have *vitulo* (eng. calf) instead of *vetula*.

But from the beginning already [the topic] was enough treated / exposed, that in the beginning of the year, following the people's custom, the *Stag* [*Cervus*] was performed.

Faustinus Episcopus Sermone in Kl. Jan.:

*Quis enim sapiens credere poterit inveniri aliquos sanæ mentis, qui Cervulum facientes, in ferarum se velint habitus commutari? Alii vestiuntur pellibus pecudum, alii assumunt capita bestiarum, gaudentes et exultantes, si taliter se in ferinas species transformaverint, ut homines non esse videantur.*

For what wise man could believe that there are sane people who would want to change [their appearance] to wild animals / beasts, making / feasting the Cervulus? Some dress in cattle skins, others wear animal heads above, feasting and jumping so that, had they turned into wild animal species, they would not seem to be human anymore.

Maximus Taurinensis in Serm. in Kal. Jan.:

*Nunquid non universa ibi falsa sunt, et insana, cum se a Deo formati homines aut in pecudes, aut in feras, aut in portenta transformant.*

Isn't all that false and crazy, when people created by God turn into cattle or beasts or monsters.

Bonifacius Episc. Moguntin. Ep. ad Zachariam PP. cap. 6:

*Affirmant se vidisse annis singulis in Romana urbe, et juxta Ecclesiam S. Petri, in die vel nocte, quando Calendæ Januarii intrant, paganorum consuetudine choros ducere per plateas, et acclamationes ritu gentilium, et cantationes sacrilegas celebrare, et mensas illas die vel nocte dapibus onerare, et nullum de domo sua, vel ignem, vel ferramentum, vel aliquid comodi vicino suo præstare velle.*

They state that every year they saw in the city of Rome, and close to St. Peter's Church, in daylight and at night, when the calends of January begin, dances and incantations as with the unfaithful ones, and profane songs are celebrated, and tables are full day and night with banquets, and nothing from the household is given to the neighbor, neither fire, not iron instrument, nothing [that could be] useful.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Translation from Latin by Carmen Fenechiu, revised by Bogdan Neagota.



## APPENDIX C

### THE OLD INCANTATION OF THE DEER VERSUS THE NEW INCANTATION OF THE DEER.

The incantation of the deer collected by Professor Ion H. Ciubotaru from Ștefan Paul, 16 years old, in the village of Oboroceni, *comuna* Heleșteni, in 1970s, and published in the book *Traditions on the Iași land*, Pim Publishing House, Iași 2010. Translation by Mirona Palas.

<p style="text-align: center;">Descântecul Cerbului</p> <p>Foiliț de-on bujor          Vin'la tata pușor,          Cerbu tati cu cercei          Spuni-i tati ci mai vrei?          Ori țî-i foami,          Ori țî-i săti,          Ori țî-i dor di codru verdi?          Codru verdi l-ai văzut,          Cî într-însu-ai fost crescut,          Așa, Jănic,-așa!</p> <p>Ia mai dă tu ochișorii roatî          Și ti uitî-n lumea toatî,          Cî di cinci anișori di zâli,          Di cînd umblu eu cu tini          Tu nu mî cunoști pi mini!          Eu sunt bulibașu Stănicî,          Cari discântî la ulcicî,          Cu lingura, cu cusătura,          Cu barosu și cu gura,          Cu lingura ti hrăneam,          Cu pila ti pileam,          Cu cusătura ti cosătoram,          Cu barosu-n cap dădeam,          Di la răuri ti scapam,          Măi botosule uăăi!</p> <p>Eu pi tini te-am găsat          Într-o păduri,          Înnodat î fragi și mure,          Înnodat și sustănat          Și di coarni agățat.          Eu fragi și mure le-am tăiat          Și te tine te-am scăpat.          Te-am adus din codru verdi,          Te-am scăpat în sat la feti,</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The incantation of the deer</p> <p>Leaflet of a peony,          Come to pappy, lil' one,          Pappy's deer with eardrops,          Tell yer pappy what more you want?          Are you hungry,          Are you thirsty,          Or you long for the green forest?          The green forest, you have seen,          In it you were born and reared,          That's the way, son, that's the way!</p> <p>Come and cast your eyes around you          And look into the whole wide world          Cuz for whole five years 'n a row          Since I've been wandering with you          You still haven't known me, have          you!          My name's Stănicî 'n I am a gypsy          king          Who breaks spells in a pipkin          With the spoon and with the stitch          With the mallet or the lips          With the spoon I used to feed you,          With the file I used to file you,          With the stitch I used to stitch you          With the mallet I'd hit heads          From the evils I had saved you,          Oh, you morose, you!</p> <p>I found you          Right in the woodland          Tangled in berries and bramble          Tangled and propped          With your horns all gibbeted          And I cut through wild berries and          bramble          And I set you free.          Took you out of the green woods,</p>
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<p>Fetili când te-au văzut, Tu pi loc ai și căzut Si-o cordică roșie mi-ai pierdut, Măi tătucă uăăăi!</p> <p>La lelița la cerdac Frumos crește-on liliac Și mă-ntreabî di ci zac; Ori di cori, Ori di varsat, Țî la dracu, țî dalac, Nu ești bolnav di dalac, Cî mai ai ș-un rost în sat! Ș-am zâs verdi de-on bujor, Hai la tata puișor, Șî te-apeacî frumușăl, Ca frunza di pătrunjăl, Așa tat,-așa!</p>	<p>In the village among the damsels, You broke loose. When the damsels spotted you, You fell down right on the spot And you lost me a red rope, Oh, you little one, oh!</p> <p>There, on the dame's porch, Nicely grows a lilac bush Asking why I lie around; Have I measles, Have I smallpox? To hell with it! Damn you, <i>Devil-in-a-Bush!</i> You're not sick of anthrax You're still of avail 'n 'tis village! So I say, green leaf of a peony Come to pappy, lil' one, And lean over nicely, Like the leaves of the parsley That's the way, son, that's the way.</p>
<p>Băi ursari,ursari voinici, Di când stati pi la potici, N-ați văzut vrun grec pe-aici? Grec bătrân, cu punga plinî, Ci sî duci la hodinî Și pândești Ca pi mini sî mă prindî Iar pi tini sî ti vândî, Sî ti ducî la abator, Sî-ți facî cărnîța ta rasol, Iar din cornițele tale, Albe și strălucitoare, Umerare la cucoane, Nu vrei tată,nuu !</p>	<p>Ye bear-leaders, fine 'n sturdy bear-leaders, Ever since ye hovering about these tracks, Have ye seen a Greek walking 'long these paths? A Greek old man, with a bagful, Going to have a loll But lurking To catch me And to sell you, Take you to the butchery, Cook jelly of your meat And make of your little horns, White and glossy ones, Hangers for the missies, You wouldn't want that, baby, no!</p>
<p>Mă duceam pe o cărare, Di nimenea umblată, Di nimenea calcată, Numai di furnici pișcatî Șî de-o babî fermecatî. Văzui șerpî cu nouă colți de fier Cu nouă de oțel, Cu nouă umblătoare, Cu nouă plimbătoare, Cu nouă fermecătoare,</p>	<p>I was walking down a path Trodden by nobody, On which no one set foot yet, Beaten by little ants only And charmed by an ol' judy I saw snakes with nine iron fangs, With nine of steel, With nine rovers, With nine hoofers, With nine soothsayers,</p>

<p>Aşa, tatî,-aşaa !</p> <p>Măi,Jănică ,puişor, Di Ț-o fost di mini dor, Di ci n-ai luat tu Gurița ta cei cu amor, Într-o frunzî di bujor S-o trimeți la mini-n zbor, Sî mă rog lui Dumnezeu Sî-ți faci mai binișor, N-ai vrut,tatî, nuu !</p> <p>Băi, la fântâna lui Adam, La izvorul lui Iordan Sunt doi dardări di jidani, Care dau bani peste bani Și mie peste mie, Ca pe mine să mă prindă, Iar pe tine să te vândă ! Hai răspunde mai curând, Cî-ți zbor crierii în vânt, Și ti sparg cu-acest Țăpoi, Cari-mpart fânu la oi, Ș-am o ghioagî Țntuitî Pentru capul tău gătitî, Aşa,tat,-aşaa !</p> <p>Ia mai fă tu ochișorii roatî Și ti uitî-n lumea toată; Cî eu răul di pi chelea ta În veșca dobi l-oi lua Șî-n Marea Caspicî l-oi arunca. Tu sî rămâi curat Și luminat, Ca Iancu din sat, Cari nu mai ari Nici un par la gard!</p> <p>Pusei traista-n cui, Făinî-ntr-însa nu-i, Pusei oala la foc, Lemni nu sunt diloc, Aşa, tatî,-aşaa! Frunzulițî stuh di baltî, Lasî vântu sî ti batî, Și soarili sî ti ardî, Dac-ai fost tu blastamat Di mini sî fii discântat, Aşa ,Jănic,-aşaa!</p>	<p>That's the way, son, that's the way!</p> <p>Hey, little Jănică, baby mine, If you missed me Why did you not kiss With your little loving yap The leaf of a peony, And then wing it to me? To God Almighty I pray To keep you alive and hale You didn't want it, sonny, did you!</p> <p>Hey, at the fountain of Adam, At the spring of river Jordan There are two yids Who'd pay lots of money And thousands of dibs To catch me, And to sell you! C'mon, sonny, answer now, Or I'll blow your brains out, And I'll thrust you with this pitchfork That gathers hay for the sheep flock And I also have a stick Ready for your head to hit, That's the way, son, that's the way!</p> <p>Cast your eyes around once more 'N look into the whole wide world; Cause the evil on your fell I will hide in the drum frame, Into the Caspian Sea I'll throw away. You shall remain pure And bright Like that old man John in village Who ain't got no more left No more stakes to his fence!</p> <p>I hung the purse on the hook, Flour in it there is nary. I put the pot on the fire, Firewood there is not any. That's the way, son, that's the way.! Reed leaflet, down by the lake, Let the wind blow you, And the sun burn you, If you were cursed I shall free you from your spell, That's the way, Jănic, that's the way.!</p>
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La vatra cu doi tăciuni,  
Undi fac fetili rugăciuni  
Sâmbata,duminica,  
Și să poată mărta.  
Da cini dracu și li ia,  
Cî-s bătrâni ca mama  
Și cărunți ca tata!  
Da nici mama nu-i bătrânî,  
Cî mai ari-un dinti-n gurî,  
Ari-un dinti ș-o măsură  
Și îs pusî-n lopoță;  
Când mânâncî molfăești,  
Când be apă mă stropești,  
Așa,tat,-așaa!

Băi ursari, jos ti puni  
Și din gur-începi-a spuni,  
Cît mânâncî borș cu pești  
Și discântî ursărești.  
Eu știu multî discântăturî,  
C-am mânâncat multî fripturî  
Și di multî ce-am mânâncat  
C-un ciolan m-am înecat.  
Părinți, cân au aflat,  
Di mânî m-au luat  
Și afarî pi ușî m-au dat!  
Ș-am luat-o pi-nsarati,  
Și m-am însurat măi frati,  
Așa, tat,-așaa!

Auleu și vai de mine,  
Cân credeam că ți-i mai bine  
Tu ti-mbolnăvești cu zile!  
Măi Ioane, Ionele,  
Adî cuțatu cu stricnele  
Și-i ieu sânghi cerbului  
Din piept,  
Di sub piept,  
Din sprânceana ochiului drept,  
Din rărunchi,  
Di sub rărunchi,  
Din sprânceana ochiului stâng!  
Din codița lui cea mică  
Sai în sus tu, măi Jenică!

In front of a fireplace with two  
cinders  
Some gals say their prayers,  
Saturdays or Sundays,  
To be able to get spliced.  
But who the deuce would wanna wed  
them?  
Cuz they're old as my mamma,  
And as grizzled as my ol' papa!  
Mamma either's not that old,  
Got one tooth in her mouth hole,  
She's got one tooth and a grinder  
One is here 'n one is yonder;  
That's why when she eats, she  
mumbles,  
And when she drinks water, she  
sprinkles.  
That's the way, son, that's the way!

Bear-leader, hey, seat yourself down  
And start out to mouth,  
While they eat borsch with fish  
And break spells, like bear tamers do.  
I know how to break many spells,  
Cuz I ate a lot of steaks  
And because I ate that much,  
With a bone I choked and such,  
When my parents this found out  
They took me by the hand  
'N through the door they kicked me  
out!  
While the night was dawning, I went  
farther  
And I got married, my dear brother,  
That's the way, son, that's the way!

Alas and woe and misery!  
When I thought you're better still  
For many days you're taken ill!  
Hey, dear Ioan, oh Ionică blade,  
Bring me that sharp bleeding blade  
To bleed the deer  
From its chest,  
From under its chest,  
From the eyebrow of the right eye,  
From the reins,  
From under the reins  
From the eyebrow of the left eye!  
From its little tail  
Up you jump, dear Jănică boy!

<p>Și sî sai o datî-n sus Ca sî nu ma faci di răs, Și sî sai o datî bini, Ca sî nu ma faci di rușâni Într-atâta amar di lumi!</p> <p>Sai, Jănică, Recunoaște-ți locu Și urmează iarăși jocul! Frunzuliț de-on harbuz Sî țai minti ci ț-am spus, Sî mai sai, Jănică-n sus! Foi verdi lămâiț Zi-i din trișcî măi bădiț!</p>	<p>And jump once up Don't put me to shame, And jump up high once again Let me not embarrass myself In front of that many people!</p> <p>Jump, Jănică, jump, Take your place And follow up the game! Leaflet of a watermelon Now remember what I told ya. Jump up and again, oh Jănică! Green leaf of the thyme, Blow the penny trumpet, boy!</p>
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The incantation of the deer collected by Alin Rus, in the village of Oboroceni, *comuna* Heleşteni, in 2014. Translation by Elena Cărbunaru-Butușină.

<p>Cuțitaș făr-de mănunchi Să m-așez într-un genunchi Că ursarul jos se pune Și din gură-ncepe a spune Când descântă ursărește Când bea apă mă stropește R:Așa urâtul tatii, așa.</p> <p>Eu pe tine te-am găsit într-o pădure Înnodat în fragi și mure Murele eu le-am tăiat Și pe tine te-am scăpat Te-am scăpat în sat la fete, Fetele când le-ai văzut, Tu pe loc ai și căzut R:Așa tată, așa</p> <p>Ia mai uite roată, roată Și te uită-n lumea toată De când umbli tu cu mine Tu nu mă cunoști pe mine Eu sunt burghezul Stănică Care descânt la ulcică Cu lingura, cu ciauanelul Cu barosul, cu ciocănlul, Cu lingura te grăneam Cu pila te pileam Cu barosu-n cap dădeam, De la rele te scăpam. R: Nu vrei tată, nu</p>	<p>Little knife without a grip On my knee I wanna sit The bear player rests a bit And opens his mouth to speak Disenchanted, the bear he plays Drinking water, at me he sprays. R: That's the way, dad's ugly cub, that's the way.</p> <p>I found you right in the woodland Tangled in berries and bramble And I cut through wild berry And so I could set you free In the town among the damsels, you broke loose When you spotted all of them, You fell down right on the spot R: That's the way, son, that's the way.</p> <p>Take another look around At the world in the surround You've wandered a lot with me Yet know nothing about me I'm Stănică, the bourgeois Who breaks spells in a pipkin With the spoon, the small cauldron, With the mallet, the small claw, With the spoon I used to feed you With the file I used to file you With the mallet I'd hit heads From the bad things I had saved you R: You wouldn't want that, baby, would you?</p>
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Colo-n vale la cireș  
Mândra mea spală cămeși  
Și le-ntinde pe nuiele  
De lătau câinii la ele  
Strânge mândro rufele  
Că turbează câinele  
Și se zbate-n legătoare  
Și se zbate până ce moare  
R:Așa urâtul tatii, așa

La fântâna lui Adam  
La izvorul lui Iordan  
Stau doi dameri de jidani  
Car dau bani peste bani  
Și mie peste mie  
Ca pe mine să mă prindă  
Și pe tine să te vândă  
Să te ducă la abator  
Să facă din cărnița ta răsol  
Iar din coarnele tale  
Albe și strălucitoare  
Umerașe la cucoane  
R:Nu vrei tată, nu

La vatra cu trei cărbuni,  
Fac fetele rugăciuni  
Sâmbăta, duminica  
Să se poată mărita  
Cine dracu să le ia  
Că-s bătrâne ca mama  
Da nici mama nu-i bătrână  
Că mai are un dinte-n gură  
Are un dinte și o măsea  
Și alea-s puse-n lopătea  
Când mănâncă molăiește  
Când bea apă mă stropește  
R:Așa urâtultatii așa

Foaie verde de mohor  
M-a pus dracu sa mă-nsor  
Că femeie ca a mea  
Nu mai are niminea  
O trimit după țigări  
Îmi aduce lumânări  
Și-am bătut-o într-o seară  
De suna ca trenu-n gară  
Și am trimis-o la părinți  
Fără păr și fără dinți  
R:Așa urâtul tatii, așa

Down the valley near the grove  
My lover washes the clothes  
And then dries them on the twigs  
And that makes the dogs bark loudly  
Darling please gather those clothes  
For the dog is now enraged  
Trying to escape its leash  
It might well rage and perish  
R: That's the way, dad's ugly cub, that's the way.

At the fountain of Adam  
At the spring of river Jordan  
Two Yid salesmen stick around  
Who'd pay lots of money  
And thousands of dibs  
To catch me  
And to sell you  
To take you to the butchery  
Of your meat to cook jelly  
And make of your little horns,  
White and glossy ones,  
Hangers for the missies.  
R: You wouldn't want that, baby, would you?

By the fireplace with two cinders  
Some girls say their prayers  
On Saturdays and Sundays  
To be able to get hitched  
Who the deuce would wanna wed them  
Since they're old as my mamma  
Even mamma's not that old  
For she still has teeth to scold  
She's got one tooth and a grinder  
One is here 'n one is yonder  
When she eats you hear her mumble  
When she drinks water, she sprinkles  
R: That's the way, dad's ugly cub, that's the way

Foxtail leaflet here is rife  
Devil made me get a wife  
For a woman as I have  
No-one has around the place  
I send her to buy cigars,  
She brings candles alas  
Once I beat her really hard  
Like a train she hissed and screeched  
And I sent her to her folks  
Without teeth and hair at all  
R: That's the way, dad's ugly cub, that's the way

Uăi Jănică frăioare  
De-aș avea la mine parale  
Aș merge în sat  
Și-am bea un raghiauș  
Sau mai bine un vinișor  
Ca de mine să nu-ți fie dor.  
R:Așa tată, așa

Fruntuliță de harbuz  
Să ții minte ce ți-am spus  
Să nu bei, să nu mănânci  
Decât un păhăruț de vin  
Din poamă aleasă  
De la gospodari din casă  
Și unu de rachiuș  
Iar mata din fluiraș  
Să ne cânti un ciobănaș.  
R: Zii bade cu fluierul.

#### **URSĂREASCA**

Foaie verde Siminoc  
Să treacă cerbul la loc  
Și ursari la mijloc  
Foaie verde foi de brici  
Că nu am ață la opinci  
Fanioane nu ne-am pus  
Sunt la mama după fus  
După fus după nuiele  
Moare mama după ele.  
Hop, hop, hop

#### **CIOBĂNAȘUL**

Foaie verde de alunăș  
Iar mata din fluieraș  
Să ne cânti un ciobănaș  
Ciobănașul pe bătute  
Cum juca ursul la munte.

#### **BOIEREASCA**

Foaie verde de o urzică  
Boiereasca să mi-o zică  
Să o zică mărunțel  
Ca frunza de pătrunjel.

Hey Jănică, my young brother  
Had I had nickel on me  
I'd go down the village  
Drink a cup of brandy  
Or better a little wine  
So that you don't miss me at all  
R: That's the way, that's it.

Leaflet of a watermelon  
Now remember what I've told you  
Only drink and eat  
A small glass of wine  
Of the precious fruit  
From the household's prime  
And a little brandy one  
And you there, whistle for us  
A sweet song about the shepherd.  
R: Play your whistle, old man, play.

#### **THE BEAR'S SONG**

Always green everlast' leaf  
Let the deer go back to its place  
And let bear masters come near  
Green leave like a razor blade  
There's no string for my *opinci*  
There's no flag to adorn us  
They're by mama's weaving loom  
Weaving loom and little twigs  
Mama's dying to have these  
Hop, hop, hop

#### **LITTLE SHEPHERD**

Green filbert leaf  
And you there, with your whistle  
Play about a sweet small shepherd  
And please don't forget the beat  
Like the bear plays on the cliff.

#### **BOYAR'S DANCE**

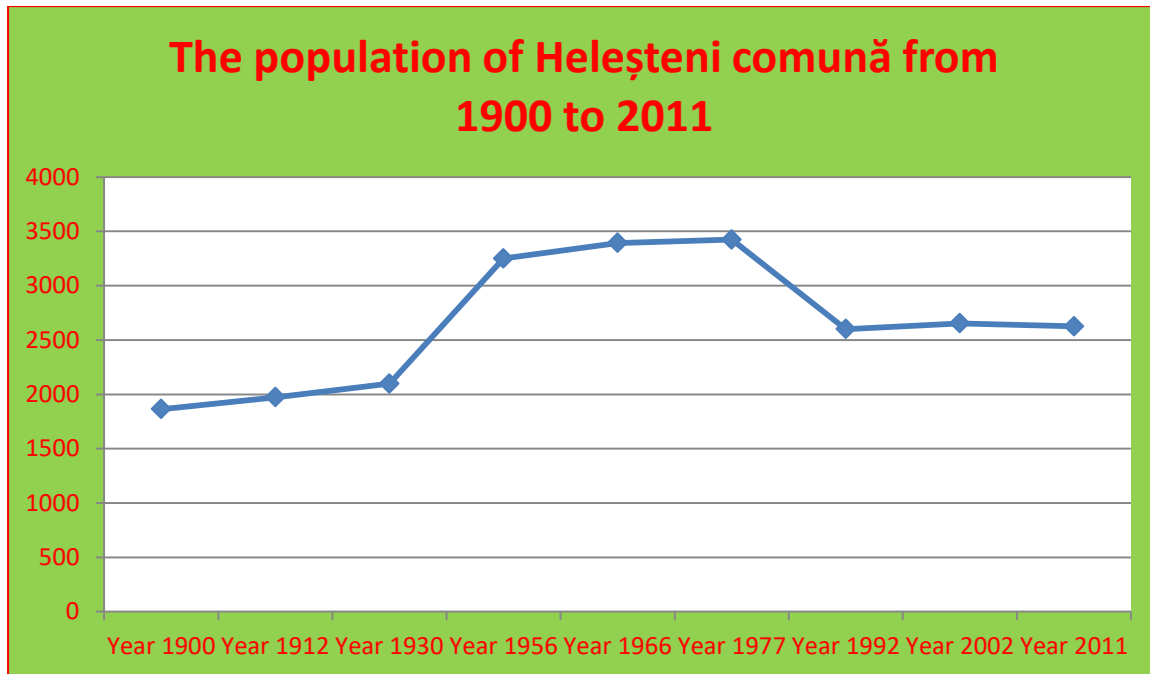
Green nettle leaf  
Let them play the boyar's dance  
In a slow beat  
As the parsley's leaflet.

**APPENDIX D**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF HELEȘTENI COMUNĂ'S POPULATION FROM 1912  
TO 2011**

<b>Year 1912</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni- Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni	
<b>1973 inhabitants</b>	1037 inhabitants	750 inhabitants	186 inhabitants	
<b>Year 1930</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni-Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni	
<b>2098 inhabitants</b>	1073 inhabitants	830 inhabitants	231 inhabitants	
<b>Year 1956</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Oboroceni	Movileni	
<b>3250 inhabitants</b>	1692 inhabitants	1132 inhabitants	426 inhabitants	
<b>Year 1966</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni
<b>3393 inhabitants</b>	847 inhabitants	1023 inhabitants	1124 inhabitants	399 inhabitants
<b>Year 1977</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni
<b>3424 inhabitants</b>	891 inhabitants	1086 inhabitants	1106 inhabitants	359 inhabitants
<b>Year 1992</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni
<b>2600 inhabitants</b>	740 inhabitants	762 inhabitants	859 inhabitants	239 inhabitants
<b>Year 2002</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni
<b>2654</b>	809	772	827	246
<b>Year 2011</b>				
Comuna	Village			
<b>Heleșteni</b>	Heleșteni	Hărmăneasa	Oboroceni	Movileni
<b>2626</b>	815	760	825	226





The population of Heleşteni comună for the year 1900 was approximated as 1864 people. Before 1912 this comună had a different administrative –territorial structure and did not include Movileni village but included Volintireşti village, which is now part of Cuza comună.

The data above came from two different sources: Archive of Heleşteni comună, and Iaşi City Bureau of Statistics (The National Censuses).

## APPENDIX E

### URĂTURĂ/PANTOMIMIC MUMMERS' CAROL COLLECTED

#### FROM A 79 YEAR-OLD

Urătură/Pantomimic Mummings' Carol collected from Ion Scripcaru, a 79 year-old, living in the village of Heleşteni, comuna Heleşteni, in 2014. Translated by Elena Cărbunaru-Butuşină.

<p>Bună vreme, măi Logofete          Că a venit seara lui Sfântu Vasile          Cu colăcei și cu pâine          Și-o plecat jupânu gazdă          Într-o joi cu 12 boi          Boi, bourei, în coadă cu gălbeni          În frunte țintăței          Trup de zeci de mii de lei          O plecat la arat          La mărul rotat          Unde-o găsit loc bun de arat          Brazdă neagra a rasturnat,          Peste brazdă a semănat          Grâu mărunț și grâu de vară          Să dea Domnul să răsară          Până în sară să răsară          Dacă nu la primăvară          După ce l-o sămănat,          Iată ce s-o întâmplat:          Un vânt mare pe pământ          După vânt, ploaie multă pe pământ          Și-o dat Domnu de-o încolțât          La luna, la săptămâna          O ieșit jupânu gazdă afară          Și-o strigat la Ili Polocanu          Ca să îi aducă calul          Și pe cal o-ncălecat          Și la lan o plecat          Lanul departe îngălbeniea          De aproape înroșea          Și inima lui jupânu gazdă creștea          De trei ori l-onconjurat          În partea stângă s-o lăsat          Trei spicușoare o luat,          În mână le-o frecat          În vânt le-o dat          În batistă le-o legat          Măi nevastă, măi femeie,          Grăul nostru o să cheie          Taci, bărbate blestemate          Stai pe vatră să-ți dau lapte          Nici în seamă nu băga          Că grăul s-a seceră          Te duci la târg</p>	<p>The time is good, you landlord,          For St. Vasile's evening's here          With bagels and bread.          And our host, the sir, he left          On a Thursday, with 12 oxen          Oxen, young ones, their tails decked with          golden coins          And all with their heads white spotted          And with their bodies worth thousands          They went to plow          Where apple trees bow          Where the land was good for plowings          They kept digging the dark furrows          Above the furrow they went sowing          Tiny grains of summer wheat          For us all may God sprout it          Until sunset it should grow          If not, in the spring 'twill show          After having it all sown          Here's what happened:          A strong blast raving on earth          After that, downpours on earth          And God made it sprout quite quick,          After a month or a week          Our dear host then went outside          And cried after Ili Polocanu          Asking him to bring a horse          And then he went on horseback          To the field he rode          Far away the field seemed yellow          And close by it was all red          The host's heart then grew with joy          He went round and round three times          On the left side he got off          Three fine spikes he gathered          With his hands he rubbed them          Through the wind he winnowed them          And then tied them with a napkin          You wife, you woman,          All our wheat might soon well perish          Shut your mouth, you wicked man,          Stay at home, I'll give you milk          Worry no more about the wheat          It will be harvested quick</p>
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<p>             Și iei nouă ocă de oțel              Și nouă de fier              Și fă seceri mari              Pentru săcerători tari              Fă săcerele mărunțele              Cu dinții de viorele              Pentru fete tinerele              O ieșit jupânu gazdă              La luna, la săptămâna              Și-o ieșit pe scări afară              Și din patru degete a fluierat              Patru sate a adunat              Numa bine s-amanat              Care săcera              Care cara              Care gireadă făcea              O mai scos jupânul gazdă              Și nouă iepe suriete              De câte nouă oui sterpe              Care cu picioarele călca              Cu coada ferezuia              Cu nările vânt trăgea              Cu urechile punea              Nici stambol nu-ți trebuia              Și-o încărcat jupânul gazdă              Douăspezece care mocănești              Și le-o trimis la moară la Odobești              Dar hoța cea de moară,              Când a văzut atâtea care              A pus coada pe spinare              Și-o plecat la lunca mare              Carele scârțâiau,              Boii rugumau              Flăcăii fluierau și din bice pocneau              Dar morarul, meșter bun              Futu-i morărița-n cur              Stătea în fundul morii              Cu mocanul în mână              Cu brâul de lână              S-o dus la cofiță              Și-o luat o mână de țărâță              Și s-o dus la portiță              Pâr pâr pâr morișca mea              Moara sta și se uita              Și ni-o prinde de dăloc              Și mi-o duce la lăptoc              Și îi dă un ciocan în cap              Și-o pune pe dulap              Și-i dă una-n șăle              Moara crâșcăie din măsele              Și-i mai trage una-n splină              Și mi-o pune pe faină              Sus în coș o înturnat              Grâu mărunțel de acela roș              Și din coș curgea în piatră           </p>	<p>             Now go to the fair              And buy a good load of steel              And another one of iron              And then mold big sickles              For strong harvesters              And mold some tiny ones, too,              With the blades as fine as dew              For young lasses around you              Then the host went outside              Every one month or a week              And from the porch of his old home              A strong whistle there he'd blown              Four villages close he drew              Just in time to feel like new              Some to harvest              Some to hoist              And some other stacks to amass              Then the host took out              Nine gray mares              Nine times each of them was fruitless              With their feet the mares kept trotting              Their tails swishing in the air              Breathing in deep through their nose              And their ears always pricked up              No more need to pay gold money              And our sir, the host, then loaded              Twelve full large mountain-like carts              And sent them for grind in Odobești              But the mooching wicked mill              Upon seeing all that fill              Turned her back              And went to trek              All the carriages squeaked              All the oxen eat              The lads whistled and then whipped              But the miller, skilled craftsman              Fuck his milling wicked woman,              Stood aback inside the mill              With the club tight in his hand              Woolen girdle round the waist              And went to the peck              Took a handful of bran              Then headed towards the gate              Creak creak creak my little wheel              And the mill stood still and watched              And he gets her by the <i>dăloc</i>              And then takes her to the gutter              And then strikes her head quite hard              And makes her rest on the locker              Then he hits her in the loins              The mill gnashing her old teeth              And hits once more in the spleen              And then hurls her in the flower              In the basket up he mingled              Red fresh wheat grains           </p>
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<p>           Și din piatră curgea în ladă            Și nu curgea făină            Ci curgea aur și mărgăritar            De care nu am văzut noi            De când suntem boieri mari            Avea jupânul gazdă            O fată frumoasă            De frumoasă ce era            Băteau câinii și urlau            Și-umbla când în casă            Când afară            Și s-o dus în cămară            Și-o luat o sătă rară            Și i s-o părut că-i prea rară            Și s-o dus a doi-lea în cămară            Și-o luat o sătă deasă            Cât în sătă și-n covată            Și-o cernut făina toată            O facut un colăcel            Nici mai mare nici mai mic            Dintr-un nește și-un neștic            Pe roata carului din-napoi măsurat            L-o pus la ușă în cuișorul de jos            Pentru plugăraș, afară l-o scos            De frumoasă ce era,            Bătea câinii și urla            Cu capul ca porumbeau            Cu gâtul ca andreaua            Cu mâinile ca fusele            Cu picioarele ca răcitoarele            Cu gura ca covata            Cu limba ca lopata            Cu dinții ca grebla            Cu ochii ca sfecla            De urat am mai ura            Dar mai știm câte ceva,            Mai avem de trecut niște pâraie glodoase            La niște fete frumoase            Cu lămpile aprinse            Cu pozdele acoperite            Cu găinaț de vraghie închestrute            De urat am mai ura,            Da nu știu ce-omm sămăna            Usturoi sau arpacică            Și-aveți un rapăn de purcică            Care numai rămă și strică            N-ați putut să-l tăieți            Înainte de Crăciun            Să-i puneți capul la fum            Să ne dați și nouă o bucată de slănină            Cat de-aici pân la fântână            Și deacolo o prăjină            Ca s-avem pe-o săptămână            Și din cap se fac sărmăluțe            Să dați la urători mâncare         </p>	<p>           And up from inside the basket            It all fell onto the millstones            And from there inside the crate            Was no flour, but gold and pearl            That we'd never seen before            Ever since we're here landlord'            And the host had a lass, too,            So beautiful that            Dogs go wild and hoot            From the house she went in and out            And once went into the larder            And there took a shabby sieve            But it seemed to be too dingy            So the second one went there            And got a sieve that was proper            And it sifted to the trough            All the flour that was there            And then kneaded a small bagel            That was neither big nor small            From a little this and that            Shaping it by the cart's back wheel            And hanged it at the door on the small nail            beneath            And then took it out for the young plowman            there            So beautiful a lass that            Dogs went wild and hooted            With a head just like a dove            And the neck like knitting needles            With hands like wool spindles            And the feet as cold as ice            A mouth like a trough            A tongue like a shovel            The teeth like a rake            And eyes like a beet            We'd go on with our carol            But there's other things we know            And some muddy brook we should cross            To get to some beautiful girls            That lit up their lamps in the night            And cover their <i>pozdele</i>            Adorning themselves with sparrow's droppings            We'd go on with our carol            But we don't know what we'll soon sow            Either garlic or scallion            You have a sow eaten by scabies            And she's there only to bust            Why didn't you slaughter her            Before Christmas            And smoke her head            To give us a piece of fresh lard            That would stretch from here to the well            And from there back here as well            Enough to feed us for a week            And from the head to cook         </p>
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<p>Nu suntem așa flămânzi  Nu suntem așa bețivi  După fiecare gălușcă,  Câte un kilogram de dușcă  La gât cu clopoței,  La ureche zurgălăi,  Îndemnați înapoi, flăcăi  Și strigați cu toții HĂI HĂI.</p>	<p>Stuffed cabbage rolls  To welcome the carolers  We are not that hungry though  Nor are we drunk,  After each dumpling we eat,  One liter of alcohol  With bells around the necks  And also clung on the ears  Go back, young lads, go back,  And cry out loud HEY HEY</p>
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## APPENDIX F

### URĂTURĂ/PANTOMIMIC MUMMERS' CAROL COLLECTED

#### FROM A 32 YEAR-OLD MAN

Urătură/Pantomimic Mummings' Carol collected from Mitică Alexa, a 32 year-old, living in the village of Oboroceni, comuna Heleşteni, in 2014. Translated by Elena Cărbunaru-Butuşină.

<p>Frunză verde de mărar          Bună seara gospodari          Gospodari și gospodine          Și voi domnișoare fine          De dormiți de nu dormiți          Vă rugăm să vă treziți          Să vă dați lângă fereastră          Să ascultați urarea noastră          Să vă dați lângă perdele          Să ascultați vorbele mele          Și încă o roată măi flăcăi          Fusta babii măturoi          Mânați măi hăi hăi          Azi a venit Sfântu Vasile          Mâine anul nou ne vine          Așa că repede ne-am adunat          Vreo patru și-am trecut la echipat          Ca să mergem la arat          La arat și semănat          Dar numai lauda e mare          Că am arat vreo trei hectare          Cât au fost zile de post          Noi la fete n-am mai fost          Și suntem așa doriți          Ca și niște pui fripți.          Și încă o roată măi flăcăi          Fusta babii măturoi          Mânați măi hăi hăi.          Frunzuliță de mohor          M-a pus dracul să mă-nsor          Și am fost într-un sat într-o comună          Să găsec o fată bună          Fată bună eu gasii          Și la mama eu o dusăi          În ogradă când intra          Găinile cotcodăciau          Vitele răgeau          Și cocoșul tot cânta          Și mai aveam vreo trei porci          Au fugit de frica ei          Mai aveam și niște găini          Au fugit pe la vecini          Era de spate înghebuieată          Și de șale cocoșată</p>	<p>Little fresh leaf of green dill          Good evening, you landlords dear,          Men and dames who rule the house          And fine young ladies likewise          Either sleeping or not yet          We beg you to wake up          And come closer to the window          And to listen to our carol          From behind the long curtain          Listen to my words          One more round dance, you young lads,          The old hag's skirt sweeps the way          Ride on, guys, ride on          Today St. Vasile's here          And the New Year's also near          So we fast gathered around          About four guys meant to mount          All the land's plowing          The plowing and the sowing          One knows only how to boast          For just three hectares we plowed          While the fast did not allow          One stopped visiting his lass          And they long for all of us          As they do for roasted bass.          One more round dance, you young lads,          The old hag's skirt sweeps the way          Ride on, guys, ride on          Foxtail leaflet here is rife          Devil made me get a wife          And so I went to a village          And even to a commune          To find a girl I could relish          And the lass I found was good          So I took her to my mom          When we entered the courtyard          The hens clucked          The cows all mooed          And the rooster led the choir          And all of our three small piglets          Were afraid and ran like hell          And there were a few hens more          That went to the house next door          For the lass was but a hunchback</p>
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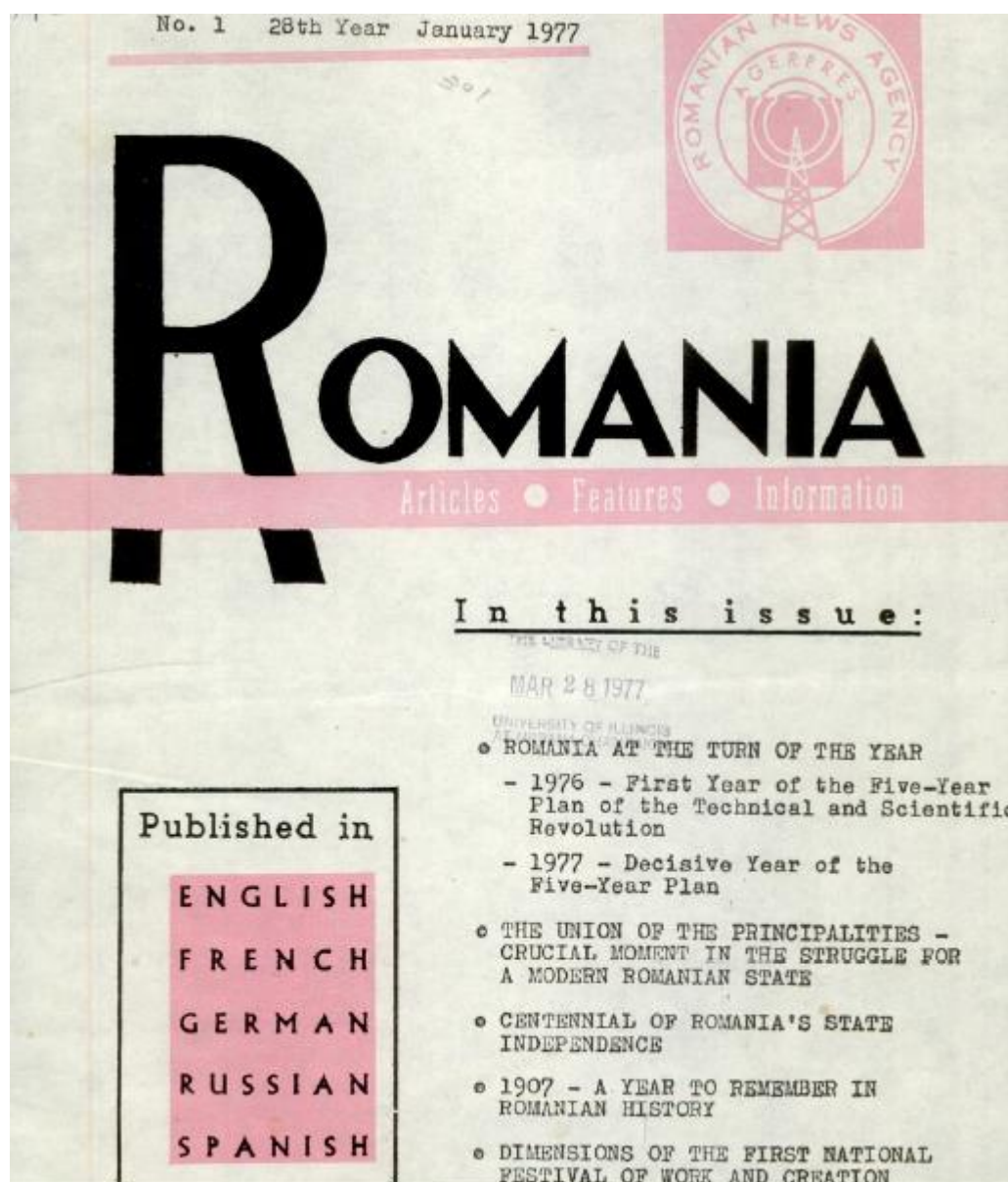
De râdea lumea toată  
 Ia mai mânați măi flăcăii  
 Fusta babei măturoi hai hai  
 Frunzuliță măracine  
 Să vă spunem și despre noi  
 Cum o ducem și noi prin lume  
 Avem salar din lună-n lună  
 Că nu-mi ajunge pe o săptămână  
 Mâncam mâncare aleasă  
 Carne friptă fără oase  
 Și bem c-un pahar de-un sfert  
 Țuică fină și vin fiert  
 Ca și cei din parlament.  
 Și-ncodată măi flăcăi  
 Fusta babei măturoi  
 Mânați măi hăi hăi .  
 De urat am mai ura  
 Dar mi-e frică c-o însera  
 Drumu-i greu și-am obosit  
 Și de foame sunt lihnit  
 De băut nici-o îndoială  
 Că boierul e în ogradă  
 Și ne așteaptă c-o sticlută  
 Să ne dea câte-o căniță  
 Și înc'o roată mai flăcăi  
 Fusta babei măturoi  
 Mânați măi hăi hăi.  
 Uratura se gătește  
 Ieși afară de ne plătește  
 Dar să nu ne luați în râs  
 De la zece milioane în sus  
 Și-un cocoș american  
 Să ne ajungă până la celălant an  
 Și-o găină vânătă  
 Să ne ajungă până sâmbătă  
 La ureche clopoței  
 Opriți plugul măi flăcăi hăi hăi.  
 La anul și la mulți ani  
 Sănătate și mulți bani hăi hăi.

And her body was all weak  
 Making everybody shriek  
 Ride on, guys, ride on  
 The old hag's skirt sweeps the way  
 Green leaves of the thorny brier  
 Let me tell you about ourselves  
 How we carry on our lives  
 We get wages month by month  
 But that's only for a week  
 And as for the food we eat  
 Boneless meat roasted on wood  
 Accompanied by a stein  
 Of hot plum brandy and wine  
 Like the ones in parliament  
 Once again, you young lads,  
 The old hag's skirt sweeps the way  
 Ride on, guys, ride on.  
 We'd like to pursue our carol  
 But I'm afraid the sun will set  
 The journey's long and we are drained  
 And the hunger made me upset  
 As for drinks there is no doubt  
 The landlord will give a shot  
 Out of the bottles he's carryin'  
 Once again, you young lads,  
 The old hag's skirt sweeps the way  
 Ride on, guys, ride on.  
 Now the carol's almost done  
 Come and pay us like a man  
 And don't ridicule us, please  
 We expect ten million at least  
 Bring the American rooster here  
 It would suffice for a year  
 And a purple hen as well  
 That we'll eat until we swell  
 Ears adorned with clinking bell  
 Stop the plow, young lads, hey, hey.  
 Happy New Year  
 Health and lots of money, aho, aho!

## APPENDIX G

### A SAMPLE OF REVISTA ROMANIA/ROMANIA JOURNAL

*Revista Romania/Romania Journal*, was a magazine published by *Agenția Română de Presă/Romanian News Agency* in five international languages (English, French, German, Russian and Spanish), expressing the official vision of the Romanian Communist Party





## APPENDIX H

### A SAMPLE OF STRUNGA MAGAZINE

Strunga is a Magazine advertising The Moldavian Rose Folklore Festival in Strunga comună.

EDITIA a XXV

*"Aflarea specificului muzical românesc va contribui la depășirea  
tăcerii locale a folclorului nostru"*

*Constantin Brăiloiu*

PUBLICAȚIE EDITATĂ CU PRILEJUL  
FESTIVALULUI FOLCLORIC "TRANDAFIR DE LA MOLDOVA"

EDITIA A XXV-A, STRUNGA-IASI, SEPTEMBRIE 1993

**STRUNGA**

BULETIN INFORMATIV NR. 4

**STIL ȘI PERFORMANȚA**

Dupa unele ezitanți și incertitudini, așa-ze ajunși în plină  
povară de a sărbători cea de a XXV-a aniversare a Festivalului  
folcloric "Trandafir de la Moldova". Echipa, pentru ca  
imediat după evenimentele din decembrie 1989, nu putea să  
fiat vocile care cereau imperios reprezentarea manifestărilor de  
acest gen, reprezentate de o valma sub semnul serbărilor  
omnigale. Incertitudinile, deorece, prevalându-se de obiectivitate,  
adesea violente, ale unor înși neînformați, stăruindu-se pe  
clar răsunător, nimeni nu s-a mai arătat dispus să sub-  
ventioneze astfel de inițiative, pentru a nu fi totuși drept  
realitate.

Și, totuși, ce s-a întâmplat după 1989 pe terenul folcloric  
tăcut de amatori? Primele semne - îngrijorătoare pentru că  
ce priveau atenț la derularea evenimentelor - s-au arătat încă  
din zilele Crăciunului înălzărat. Afară se trasea înă stăm de

eres pe talentați dansatori din Costulești, care ne-au propus  
introducerea repertoriului coreografic de o tulburătoare autentici-  
tate și valoare.

Rezultatele celor două întâlniri i-au stimulat pe organiza-  
tori, ajungându-se treptat ca la Strunga să fie prezente nu doar  
inacții, ci și amatori din județele învecinate. Apoi fructu-  
valul și-a extins aria de cuprindere, câștigând treptat un cer-  
caracter **național**, ce avea să culmineze cu ediția din 1990, a  
XXIV-a, când la Strunga au participat nu mai puțin de nouă  
formule folclorice din Republica Moldova și zona  
Cernăuților, toate fiind purtătoare ale unor emoționante me-  
saje ale artei noastre populare înstrăinate.

Scopul esențial al Festivalului de la Strunga, stipulat în  
Regulamentele anuale, care merita să argumentăm și să justifi-  
căm existența, era că se poate de corect: **construcția muzi-**

*"ea  
pajizea"*



## APPENDIX J

### ROMÂNIA PITOREASCĂ/PICTURESQUE ROMANIA MAGAZINE, NO. 1/1977

The number 1/1977 of the *Picturesque Romania* magazine appears with the picture of *Deer* mask in the area of Iași County on the cover.







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