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From Transcribing Orality to Oral Practices of Writing

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FROM TRANSCRIBING ORALITY TO ORAL PRACTICES OF WRITING.

RURAL AND POPULAR CULTURES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

150 years since the birth of
ALEXANDRU TZIGARA-SAMURCAȘ (1872-1952)
Founder of the Ethnographic and National Art Museum (1906)

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Introduction. From Transcribing Orality to Oral Practices of Writing

Anamaria Iuga
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
anaiuga@gmail.com

Frosa Pejoska-Bouchereau
National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations (INALCO), France

Krassimira Krastanova
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Corina Iosif
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania

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ABSTRACT

This special issue of *Martor* problematizes the complex relationship between the written and the oral in the production of meaning that defines "traditions," community and group relations, in different contexts of change (post-communism, migration, the use of hypermedia, storytelling, and so on). It approaches the new ways orality is found in contemporary societies, but also opens avenues for methodological discussions in ethnological research regarding the phenomenon of orality in contemporary societies, dominated by history and written texts.

KEYWORDS

Orality; written practices; tradition; storytelling; hypermedia.

"Once upon a time" goes one of the best-known formulas for beginning a story and preparing oneself and the audience to imagine all that will happen in a story that is about to be told. In the late twentieth century, for example, adults and children could already hear stories from different sources and experience various types of interaction. From a genealogical perspective, stories can be oral, transcribed, or written, the "once upon a time" formulaic beginning placing the story in the third category, that of literary stories. And it is only through the shift from written text to its oral expression that the literary story becomes emblematic of a particular manner of oral narration, the mentioned formulaic beginning thus becoming representative of the same oral by-product of the written text. This approach highlights the historical and, more importantly, contextual nature of storytelling.

Those who grew up in the 1960s through the 1980s can remember well spending our childhood years listening to stories told by our parents, their parents, or any other person who had been raised in an oral culture. So, we would see the performer, hear his or her voice and intonation, watch his or her gestures (see Calame-Griaule 1965, 1977, 2008; Bernus and Calame-Griaule 1981) and by this enter the realm of the story brought up to life by the speaker. There were particular stories that the children requested time and time again, every night, but each time new details popped up, the plot became increasingly complicated, the dialogue between characters changed:

although it was the same story, it felt like a new one, and this was what children enjoyed.

Even though storytelling constitutes one of the first means for experiencing narrated fiction in human communities, children are not the only audience for storytelling. This particular practice is a by-product whose origins can be traced back to storytelling as a social practice, for example, in France, from 1690 to 1790 (Storer 1928; Barchilon 1975). At the time, women, who were the initiators of this fad, developed a discourse on the literary story (fantastic or otherwise) as being intended for children (especially princes). This is also where the image of the grandmother surrounded by children listening to her telling a story originates (see Gustave Doré's drawings: Raymonde 1982; Defrance 1998).

Such an experience is widespread in societies defined by "primary orality" (Zumthor 1990; Ong 2002), where "the strength of speech is limited only by its impermanence and inexactitude" (Zumthor 1990: 19–20) and characterized by variability (see Goody 2010; Görög-Karady and Seydou 1982; Baumgardt 2008). While "primary orality" is far from dominating contemporary European societies, it can still be found here, coexisting with writing; in these societies, one can experience, as Paul Zumthor (1990) explains, a "mixed orality." The cohabitation of oral and written cultures is visible already starting with the ancient texts (see Crosby 1936; Goody 2010), or the Middle Ages when, for example, "the masses of the people read by means of the ear rather than the eye, by hearing others read or recite rather than by reading to themselves" (Crosby 1936: 88; see also Nisard 1854; Bollème and Andriès 2003), and therefore, writers would address in their work both readers and hearers.

This points to a second situation where a story/composition is created by written means, but it is delivered by oral performance, a situation illustrative of "second orality" (Zumthor 1990), one defined by an orality reconstructed based on written sources. Following on our example, children in the twentieth century could also listen to stories that were read by parents from books with wonderful covers and beautiful drawings or paintings. In this case, the voice was bringing back to life a world that was dormant in the pages of the book, as the storyteller's speech was fixed in writing. The imagination was thus guided not only by the voice heard, or by the written text, but also by the illustrations, which the children were able to "read," even if they could not read the alphabet. In this type of societies, orality coexists with writing and printing, "technologies of communication" (Mason 1998: 308) that enable duplicating (and freezing in time) the spoken word, as Zumthor explains (1990: 26). Even more so, as stated by many scholars (see Crosby 1936; Goody 1973; Finnegan 1974; Zumthor 1990; Ong 2002), "writing does not put an end to oral tradition" (Zumthor 1990: 26), they in fact coexist, interact, and influence each other constantly (see Finnegan 1974; and Levy 1981 for the Chinese tradition). Above all, as Jack Goody points out, writing helps shift language "from the aural to the visual domain" (1973: 78), regardless of the scholars' efforts to write down the words as they were spoken and heard—for example, in dialectological transcriptions of speech (see Bîrlea 1966). After all, these books are only meant for the eyes of specialists. Moreover, writing is integrated among the mechanisms of transmission and reproduction of local (rural or folk) cultures. As a result, oral narratives reified in written form are often reintegrated and reinterpreted into the oral dimensions of the life of a community, mainly through storytelling. Over the years, researchers who study the relationship between orality and writing have focused on linguistic aspects (see Foley 1990), or the dynamic between oral memory and written memory in the process of transmitting local cultures (see Goody 1973, 2010; Labrie 1984). These studies have led to the present epistemological theoretical frame, as well as,

and just as significantly, to methodological transformations.

In a third storytelling experience typical of the twentieth century, people could listen to stories on the radio, vinyl records, or watch them in the form of a movie on TV. All are instances of "mechanically mediated orality," according to Paul Zumthor (1990), or "second orality," as Walter Ong (1999, 2002) calls it. For example, starting with January 12, 1929, on Radio Romania's program "Children's Hour," children could listen and fall asleep to stories performed (or just told/read) where the atmosphere of the story was recreated by the voices of actors and the sounds produced in the studio (Moceanu 2020). This authentic experience enabled a child, or even grown up, to visualize any story using their imagination. This orality was made possible by the various new technologies in telecommunication, starting with the end of the nineteenth century, and mediated by the various machines that broadcasted and celebrated it. Such an oral tradition is specific to contemporary societies that are part of the "electric revolution," the third major technological milestone of humankind in what concerns communication (McLuhan 2011). Radio, TV, telephone, gramophone, and all sorts of recording technologies "restored to voice an authority almost lost" (Zumthor 1990: 18). At the same time, the voice was freed from any spatial limitation (*Ibid.*), but all sorts of restrictions came along. The most important one is that orality has lost one of its attributes: variation. It is true, recording allows us to capture any voice, any utterance, but what is being set to tape is actually an "arbitrary sample" of a performance (Goody 2010: 6), or a "template version" (*version-modèle*) (Baumgardt 2008: 82); "it becomes an oral document of the past" (see also Iosif et al. 2019). Besides, due to recording, speech (and sound in general) has lost its perishability, its evanescence, its relationship with time (Ong 1999), and it can thus be turned on anytime and anywhere. Even more, the physical presence of a speaker is eliminated (Zumthor 1990), which allows any recording to be an "echo of the voice" (Goody 2010: 19).

Already in the twentieth century there were so many technologies that enabled communication: "In the global village, radio becomes 'the tribal drum' [citing McLuhan–editors note] of the new electric tribe; the newspaper becomes the land of simultaneity which can annul all space and time barriers and which turns each experience into a group or society experience" (Lamberti 2004: para. 3). The fast-paced technological advancement over the past years has emphasized the importance of oral culture for humankind, and the need to communicate in any way possible. Thus, with the emergence of the new electronic and digital technologies at the end of the twentieth century and in the first decades of the twenty-first century, new mediators came along: computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and so on. They all make use of the world wide web, "a community of communities" (McClelland 2000), which brings people together "in a media embrace in spite of spatial location, and makes them part of social practices shared at the same time, therefore offering them a sort of new 'electric body' and 'tribal psyche'" (Lamberti 2004: para. 3).

As a matter of fact, orality is a dynamic phenomenon that, as pointed out by Zumthor (1990), in contemporary times no longer plays the same role it did for our ancestors, taking new forms, such as the already mentioned "mediatized" orality, but also the new "digital" orality (Lafkioui and Merolla 2005). These are completely different from Zumthor's the "primary," "mixed," and "secondary" orality (1990), sometimes combining all their characteristics, highlighting their innovative nature, and other times taking unexpected forms that use the latest channels of communication. For this reason, the new media channels must be taken into consideration today, especially given the fact that in the age

of the hypermedia, the internet reaches a wide range of audiences. As a result, the researchers have been focusing increasingly on how the internet is integrated into oral cultures and how it contributes to the endorsement of local identity (see Castleton 2016; Lafkioui and Merolla 2005). The connections between the internet and the oral traditions have already been explored by John Miles Foley in his book published posthumously in 2012. Both oral tradition and the internet are seen by the researcher as similar cultural practices: the performance is non-linear, subject to variation (websites also change constantly); defined by communal authorship; and made available to a wide audience, considerably larger for the hypermedia. As a result, there are some similarities in cognitive pathways that the internet users and the oral performers are using, making sense of the correspondences between the ancient and modern technologies of communication. At the same time, Foley points out the differences: the internet, unlike the oral tradition, is dependent on written culture, outside which it cannot exist, although visual and audio information can be retrieved online, helping the reader (in this case the internet user) "to understand the epic less as an item and more as an experience" (Foley 2005: 255). Following on our example, in these first decades of the twenty-first century, a child can listen to stories told/performed online, either in the form of a performance, a cartoon, or simply as a text, via a host of social media channels: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and so on.

Obviously, the complex and dynamic relationship between the oral and the written expression of human communication is today more challenging than ever. The explosive development of communication technologies opens up an unprecedented dimension of this relationship, accompanied by new processes through which the relationship between writing and orality is recalibrated and reconfigured emerging. It challenges all researchers of human societies. The approach to these processes from any classical disciplinary perspective, whatever it may be, remains ineffective for a deep understanding of the contemporary relationship between orality and writing.

This volume brings together texts that talk about the transformation of orality into text, but also the way electronic devices and hypermedia incorporate orality. All of them are based on the dynamic aspect of orality in contemporary local cultures and present examples of recent practices of modernity, where experiences become texts, but also where certain areas of social life are transferred into the virtual realm.

Apparently heterogeneous in their approaches and themes, the studies that make up the current issue of the journal represent, in fact, the multitude of processes and phenomena of reorganization and re-hierarchization of the relationships between the oral and the written expressions of communication.

In accordance with the basic structure of the journal, the volume is composed of four sections, preceded by an introduction. The first section, titled "Writing Orality. Production and Legitimation of the Past," has as its main theme the relationship between the archived text and writing as a graphic expression of oral communication. The studies authored by Anete Karlsone, Olga Vl. Maltseva, Mirela Florian, Diana Mihuț, and Florența Popescu-Simion discuss subjects from various geographical areas (Latvia, the Amur region, or various rural areas in Romania), as well as different life situations (handcrafts, fishing, soldiers in the First World War, private life, or relationship with death), but they are all historical approaches to the process by which orality becomes a written text, thus legitimizing and explaining the past and certain social phenomena (see also Pejoska 2018; Iosif 2019).

The second section, "Orality as a Tool. The Production of the Continuous Present," includes five studies whose themes while

diverse are also convergent: they all deal with the topic of recorded audiovisual (or written) memory as a form of transition from orality to writing. Thus, oral communication, even if occasionally recorded in the form of written text, audiovisual recording, internet-mediated communication, or archived record, remains a privileged tool for cultural transmission and knowledge production, for living the past as a continuous present. The studies that make up this section are written by Christina Alexopoulos de Girard, Laura Jiga Iliescu, Mélanie Nittis, Stefana Yorova, and Marin Constantin.

The third section, "Orality on Display" is dedicated, as with previous *Martor* issues, to the junction between cultural action, ethnological reflection, and museum display. It includes two studies focusing on artistic projects: one that is a result of an applied ethnology endeavor, and the other a result of a complex educational project. Both focus on heritage issues, both are a source of cultural action projects and a model for patrimonial ethics. The first text is written by Krassimira Krastanova, Maria Kissinova and Elitsa Stoilova, and the second by Ioana Corduneanu.

Three reviews of recently published books that are relevant to the topic of orality make up the final section of the volume. The theme of storytelling, developed in the third section, is thus consolidated. However, in this last section, the reader's attention is additionally directed to two extremely important themes for the issue of orality, which are missing from the volume: that of "ethnic show" stage performance and that of traditional music.

The discussion on orality remains open. It is obvious today for all researchers that the nuanced and profound understanding of the relationship between orality and writing is central to any approach to understanding contemporary society, from the cultural, sociological, historical, technological, or any other point of view. The current issue of *Martor* journal is but a small contribution to a broader contemporary discussion concerning orality.

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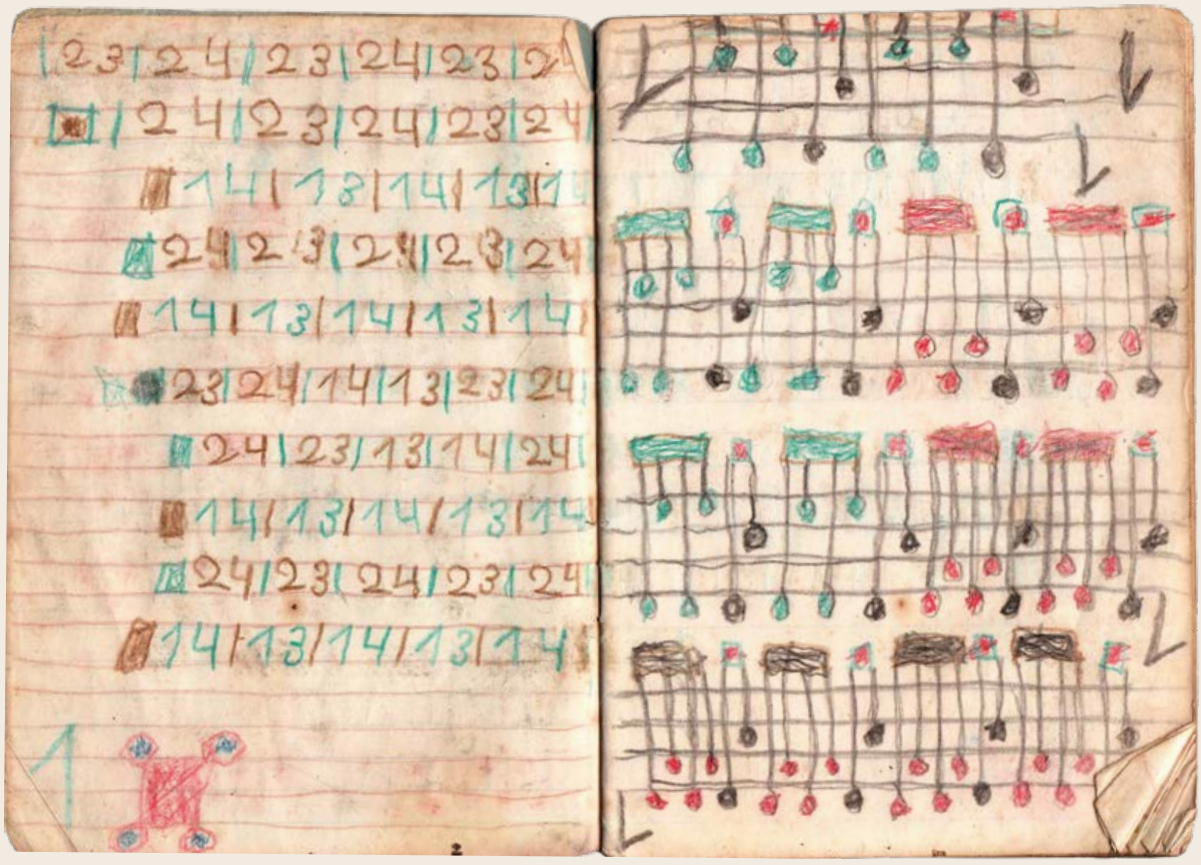
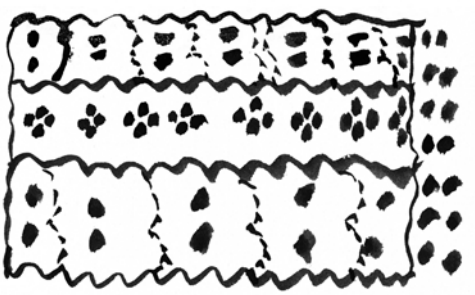


I. Writing Orality.
Production and Legitimation of the Past



Heritage-making: Written Texts in the Transmission of Traditional Knowledge of Natural Dyeing

Anete Karlsone
Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia, Latvia
anete.karlsone@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Natural dyeing is an element of intangible cultural heritage which is gaining new relevance today. Heritage-making as a set of purposeful activities has become an object of interest for researchers relatively recently, and this study is reflective of that. The paper aims to focus on natural dyeing as a component of cultural heritage, its documentation process, and how written texts have influenced the living tradition of natural dyeing. One of the sources for the study was ethnographic material, which provides insight into the little researched tradition of natural dyeing. To understand how the tradition was described and explained, Latvian press publications on natural dyeing were evaluated by applying qualitative and quantitative research methods. In order to study the situation today, a survey was conducted in 2016 and 2017 among dyeing workshop participants in different parts of Latvia. The results of the study indicate that the use of written sources plays an important role in practicing natural dyeing. With various activities organized by professional and amateur ethnographers, artists, handicraft teachers, etc., as well as its coverage in the press, natural dyeing has preserved its relevance. Written texts have documented the activities in the field of natural dyeing and encouraged further development of the tradition. Moreover, various sources have been used to preserve and develop dyeing skills, through both direct observation/oral tradition and written/visual materials. In addition, one's personal experience as a significant part of the construction of identity was relevant in the past and still is today.

KEYWORDS

Heritage studies; heritage-making; natural dyeing; traditional craftsmanship; Latvia.

Introduction

In today's changing socio-political context, cultural heritage continues to play a role as the foundation for the preservation and expression of identity, in which many of today's cultural processes are rooted. In this paper, the term cultural heritage is used and understood mainly as intangible cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO in the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2020: 5). According to Azoulay, "Living heritage—performing arts, oral expressions, social practices, rituals, festive events, and traditional knowledge—is an integral part of human life. Handed down from parents to children, from masters to apprentices, from teachers to pupils, it is safeguarded through transmission" (2020: V).

The concept of heritage-making has been often referred to in scholarly publications in recent decades (Petrova 2018; Maags and Svensson 2018; Steiner 2016; Heinich 2011, etc.), especially in the field of museology, although there is no one common definition for it. In this article, the notion is used to

mean a set of deliberate actions with the aim of drawing the public's attention to a certain cultural phenomenon or a heritage object, with the desire of increasing its value to society. The use of cultural heritage to create contemporary national cultures began in the previous centuries. Conscious heritage-making was initiated in many European countries in the nineteenth century, as part of the nation-building process. Additionally, intangible cultural heritage, as well as its inventorying and instrumentalizing, have been an important component in the "cultivation of culture" (Leerssen 2006).

In Latvia too, the heritage-making process was encouraged with the aim to strengthen national self-awareness. Seeing as traditional craftsmanship is one of the fields of intangible cultural heritage, information on craft skills began to be collected and distributed in the late nineteenth century. The first publications on natural dyeing appeared in Latvian periodicals around this time as well. But the tradition of dyeing with plants continued to develop and coexisted with written texts.

Nowadays, natural dyeing, or the use of natural substances for coloring textile materials, is relevant both as one of the forms of traditional craftsmanship and as a means of ecologically sustainable development. Since the discovery of the first aniline dye in 1856, using natural substances for textile coloring has become an alternative dyeing technique; however, the knowledge of natural dyeing has not been forgotten.

Today in Latvia, scholarly publications on natural dyeing focus on topics related to the dyeing process or chemical analyses (Bernava 2013; Karlsone and Valkovska 2019; Valkovska and Orola 2021a), the plants used for dyeing (Karlsone 2017; Valkovska and Orola 2021b, 2021c), or, relatively less, on the place of tradition in society and its historical development (Karlsone 2018, 2019). Although some papers deal with how the living tradition has been reflected in the publications (Karlsone 2016, 2021), there is a lack of information on how written texts have influenced the practice of natural dyeing.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the documentation process of natural dyeing in the context of cultural heritage, and how written texts have influenced the living tradition. The tradition of natural dyeing has not yet been studied from this angle. Furthermore, the paper addresses the importance of cultural heritage in the construction of identity. As stated in the book *Understanding Heritage: Perspectives in Heritage Studies*: "The heritage of humanity has to be understood as a crucial factor in the processes of identity formation and as a fundamental resource for human development" (Albert et al. 2013: 2). Traditional handicrafts rooted in cultural heritage are a popular occupation (which includes making Latvian folk costumes) and hobby for leisure time. There are many handicraft groups in Latvia, most of which are under the umbrella of the Latvian Folk Art Union. The Latvian Folk Art Union has been a full member of the European Folk Art and Craft Federation (EFACF) since the year 2007, and its members are non-profit organizations with a clear aim to promote and engage in folk art and crafts. The network aims to strengthen contact between craftsmen in European countries in the context of exchange of skills and knowledge. Today the Federation is a network consisting of twelve European organizations in eleven different countries" (Prīberga 2020). Natural dyeing as a traditional craft skill is actively used by both Latvian handicraft groups and individual master craftspeople in handmade textile production to create contemporary folk art objects.

This paper is based on both published and unpublished written sources, as well as a survey conducted by the author in 2016–2017. The tradition of natural dyeing is reflected in ethnographic materials, mainly manuscripts from the repository of the Latvian National Museum of History (LNMH) and the Repository of Ethnographic

Materials at the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia (REM ILH UL). The published written sources are mainly texts in Latvian periodicals from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century, in which natural dyeing is mentioned. They have been analyzed to determine how the tradition was described and interpreted. In studying these materials, both content and statistical analysis were used. In addition, the responses to the survey reflect the practice of natural dyeing, its level of preservation, and the application of these skills and knowledge today.

The first part of the paper provides insight into the evidence of the tradition of natural dyeing as reflected in ethnographic material. Next, it provides an overview of Latvian press publications on natural dyeing, describing their content as well as their dynamics. The paper then examines the results of the survey regarding the significance of written texts in the development of the tradition. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings of the study.

Ethnographic Material

Regular collection of ethnographic material organized by Latvians themselves began comparatively late.[1] The first ethnographic expeditions with the aim of obtaining material for the first Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition (1896) took place at the very end of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, and yet understandably, attention was not paid to collecting materials on natural dyeing during these expeditions. This happened only in the twentieth century, after the First World War. The largest collection of unpublished written historical sources documenting dyeing with plant dyes consists of records of ethnographic fieldwork, also called expeditions. There are two main such collections in Latvia: the repository of the Latvian National Museum of History (collected in 1924–1931 and 1942–1943) and the Repository of Ethnographic Materials at the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia (collected from 1947 to the present day). Both professional scholars and amateur ethnographers—mainly handcrafters, artists, and students—were involved in gathering the ethnographic material. Despite the large number of documents containing information on natural dyeing, the data is rather scattered and uneven, as dyeing was not the main interest of ethnographers and their assistants. Nevertheless, the fieldwork descriptions contain valuable information. These materials cover all regions of Latvia but are not evenly distributed across the country.

At the LNMH, the ethnographic documents mainly comprise standardized forms filled in by fieldwork participants in which information on natural dyeing was recorded as shorter or longer narratives. In several cases, color samples were also added to the description of the natural dyeing process or to the list of dye plants. In addition, there are some examples of herbaria. The descriptions contain information on practicing natural dyeing mainly from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s.

At the REM ILH UL, the ethnographic materials on natural dyeing consist of both standardized forms and free recordings of narratives. There are also some samples of naturally dyed yarn, but no herbaria. The information on natural dyeing covers the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1980s, mostly dealing with knowledge from the 1920s and 30s, as well as from the Soviet period.

In both of these collections, the ethnographic expedition records not only provide information about dye plants, their methods of use, and the obtained colors but also describe the intensity of the practice of this traditional skill in the span of the narrator's memory. Moreover, the materials

not only provide evidence of the tradition of using dye plants in general but also specify their relevance during a particular period of time, for example, during the war. As mentioned in the descriptions held at the LNHM, the difficult economic conditions during the First World War created a demand for ancient skills that had not yet been completely forgotten. This facilitated their updating and extended use, enabling the next generation to acquire this knowledge.

When analyzing the materials, the way in which the narrator spoke about plant dyeing was important. Therefore, I could determine three levels of accuracy:

1) The narrator spoke in the present tense, showing that she was well acquainted with the process and had participated in it herself, perhaps relatively recently.

2) The narrator spoke in the past tense, showing that she spoke about activities she had observed or performed in the past and that had been practiced at some point in the past, possibly during her youth. This suggests that inaccuracies or errors may have occurred over time, as the narrator's memory may have lost something previously known.

3) The narrator spoke in the oblique (inferential, conjunctive) mood in the past tense. This mood refers to action that the narrator herself did not witness, indicating a set of actions that had almost disappeared and were no longer practiced, which the narrator may not have witnessed at all, but only learned about from other people's accounts.

The samples of yarn or herbarium plants supplementing several documents show a high degree of reliability of the information told by the narrators; moreover, they indicate that the use of natural dyes was still practiced at that time. These examples suggest that the people who spoke about dyeing with plant dyes were aware of the processes themselves. However, it was much more common for them to recount actions that had taken place in the past and they most likely had only observed without capturing significant details and nuances.

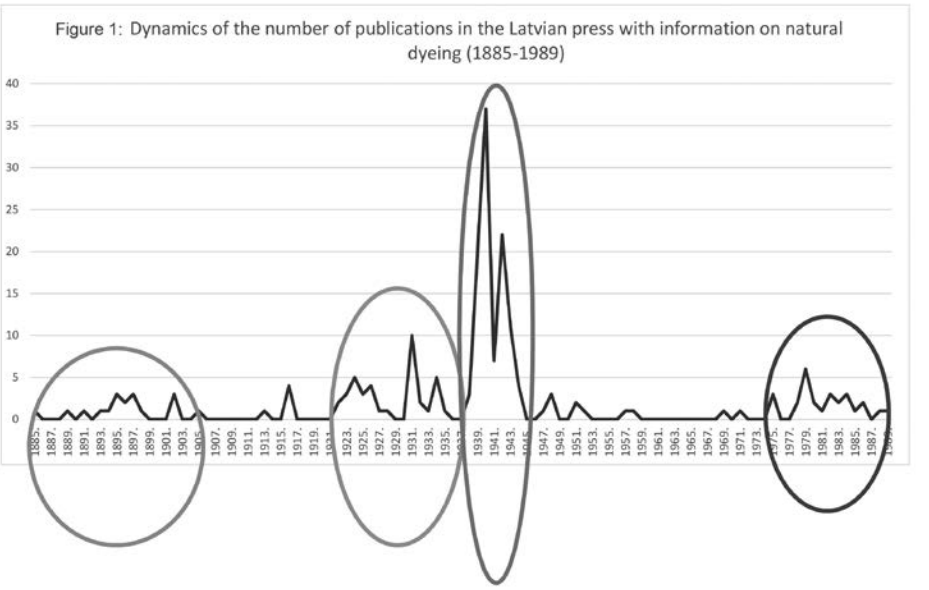
The ethnographic field records from the 1920s and 30s and the period of the Soviet occupation do not contain direct information on the influence of written texts on the living tradition. This can be evaluated through the study of other sources.

The recipes mentioned in the records are usually quite approximate and often incorrect, which indicates that the use of dye plants was uncommon and even largely a disappearing tradition in the twentieth century. In this context, the presence of written texts in the press was helpful for maintaining the tradition. With various activities organized by amateur ethnographers, artists, handicraft teachers, etc., natural dyeing acquired new relevance.

Articles in Latvian Periodicals

The Latvian press is a valuable mirror that reflects important developments in the life of society on both a large and small scale. The emergence of a topic, and especially its recurrent presence in the press, shows that it can attract the attention of a more general audience and not just a narrow circle of stakeholders—that is, it has a certain role in the current life of society. The content and context of the information may indicate this importance, as well as testify that the publications are a part of the heritage-making process.

The earliest mention of natural dyeing in the Latvian press dates to 1769 ([Vilde] 1769), but in this case it was merely supplemental information in an article on medicinal plants used by Latvians. More significant mentions in the context of heritage-making appear from 1885



onwards. The number of publications varied considerably over time, larger or smaller peaks alternating with completely empty periods. This study analyzed 175 articles, reports, and notices covering the period from 1885 to 1989 (Fig. 1). This is not a large amount for the span of a century, but it nevertheless provides insight about the interest of the public and its dynamics over time and evidence about activity in the field.

We can identify four periods when publications on natural dyeing occurred more often. The first one covers the late nineteenth and very beginning of the twentieth century, when ethnographic materials on plant dyeing began to be published in the Latvian press. At that time Latvians, who were still citizens of the Russian Empire, became more and more aware of the unity of their nation, and the Latvian intelligentsia became actively involved in cultivating national culture, including the collection and description of cultural heritage. Information about natural dyeing was gathered as part of the intangible cultural heritage, as a traditional craft skill. Papers on natural dyeing ([Blaus] 1885; Saržants 1893; Zilumkalns 1894) were included in the collections of materials on Latvian folklore and language that began to be published by Latvian cultural workers. Although there were only a few articles on natural dyeing, the publications contained valuable, detailed information and were later used as sources by other authors. In the Latvian-language periodicals published in the late nineteenth century, information on the use of dye plants is quite rare. Nevertheless, this period is characterized by the publication of the first ethnographic materials: descriptions of dyeing methods and lists of dye plants, as well as the first scholarly articles on natural dyeing. The papers written by Miķelis Skruzītis illustrate the first attempts to give an overview of the Latvian dyeing tradition (1895, 1902). These studies were based on information collected by the author himself. They were also significant as part of the heritage-making process because they drew readers' attention to the fact that dyeing with natural dyes was not simply an outdated technology, as opposed to the use of aniline dyes, but it was a value to be preserved, a treasured set of knowledge inherited from our ancestors.

The next rise in the activity of publications on natural dyeing occurred in the 1920s and

30s, i.e., after the First World War and the establishment of the independent Republic of Latvia in 1918. The new political situation led to increased interest in folk culture, for example, in ethnographic and archaeological heritage, folklore, and traditional craftsmanship. Women's magazines, ethnographic and cultural history publications, and regional newspapers published a variety of information, including on natural dyeing. In the 1920s and 30s, public interest in Latvian traditional culture, including crafts, increased significantly, as national values were the basis for the new state's cultural policy. Moreover, women's handicrafts—embroidery, knitting, weaving, etc., as well as dyeing with plant dyes—were included in the curricula of handicrafts, home economics, and agriculture schools.

Ethnographic material also continued to appear in the press during this period (Ziemels 1924, 1935; Riekstiņš 1925). On the one hand, these publications provided information on known dye plants and their methods of use, while on the other hand, the articles also contained information on the attitudes toward this field of traditional knowledge that existed at the time ([Birģele-Paegle] 1923; Liepiņa 1931, among others). Moreover, public opinion was influenced through these written texts. As mentioned in many publications, natural dyes were valuable because of their aesthetic qualities but also as ancestral heritage. Several reasons were given to justify natural dyeing at a time when chemical dyes dominated textile dyeing: (1) aesthetic (soft, pleasant colors; a great variety of shades; a range of colors corresponding to the local natural landscape; all shades are in harmony with each other[2]); (2) practical (colorfastness of the dyed textile [high washing fastness, does not fade], low cost of the dyestuff); (3) cultural-historical (an ancient, inherited skill; beginning in 1934 it was emphasized that this was an ancient Latvian skill[3]); and (4) ecological (dye plants as untapped natural resources).

The only drawback was that natural dyeing was more labor-and time-intensive.

Craftspeople, home-economics teachers, and instructors of courses offered by the Mazpulki children's agricultural education organization (the Latvian equivalent of 4-H, an organization based in the United States dedicated to developing children's potential) were the authors of most of the interwar publications on natural dyeing (Zauls 1934a, 1934b; Niedra 1938; etc.). Amateur ethnographers also produced articles on the subject (Niedre 1931).

The press became a channel for spreading information about traditional craftsmanship. In addition, already published ethnographic material on natural dyeing was used as a source for other publications by different authors. In fact, some recipes were reprinted several times, and their 'journey' from one author's publication to another can be traced. Thus, information about certain dye plants was kept in the public awareness, although this did not always mean more frequent use of these particular plants in an earlier time. However, it may have contributed to their use at the time of publication of the text. It should be noted that many of the authors of these articles—Jānis Niedre, Helēne Vollenberga (also H. Zariņa), Žanis Ventaskrasts, among others—as well as several anonymous authors were not dyers themselves (as can be concluded from their publications), and they only collected information on natural dyeing from different sources without testing its credibility. In this way, the inaccuracy or misinterpretation introduced by an author traveled from publication to publication, creating inconsistencies with the original ethnographic material. In this context, publications by home-economics instructors and teachers contained more plausible knowledge on dye plants and the related techniques. In the context of heritage-making, the introductory parts of articles contained ample statements about the main value of natural dyed colors being their aesthetic qualities and ancestral heritage.

The third period of activity of publications on natural dyeing occurred in 1939–1944, right before and during the Second World War, when Latvia was occupied first by the Soviet Union and then by the Nazi regime.[4] We see a rapid increase in the number of publications in 1939 and the first half of 1940 (up until the Soviet occupation). After a short fall in 1941, the next peak in the number of publications was reached in 1942, only to gradually decrease until the summer of 1944.[5]

During this period, ethnographic material obtained from individual narrators was no longer published in the press. Nevertheless, there were still publications with practical information on natural dyeing, as well as information about public activities in the field, especially in 1939. Although direct warfare did not take place on Latvian land until July 22, 1941, it is possible that the beginning of the Second World War in Europe amplified tensions in Latvian society as well, leading to increased activities connected with cultural heritage, including traditional crafts, with the aim to strengthen national identity. Lists of dye plants that should be collected in a particular season were published regularly (Ķeņģe 1940a, 1940b; Strauta 1941; [Anonymous] 1942a, 1942b, 1943, 1944; Šillere 1944; etc.). These written texts helped to maintain and spread information about natural dyeing. Natural dyeing continued to be presented as valuable Latvian heritage while emphasizing the practical considerations regarding its usefulness. As economic conditions deteriorated because of the war, practical considerations began to dominate the topic and justify the need for using dye plants. The traditional knowledge about using local plants compensated for a lack of chemical dyes and mordant.

After the Second World War, publications on natural dyeing almost completely disappeared from the Latvian press, although a few articles with practical information could still be found here and there (Lapsiņa 1947; Skujiņa 1951a, 1951b). As shown in the diagram (Fig. 1), mentions of natural dyeing made a comeback in the late Soviet-era press. There were reports and articles about handicrafts and weaving studios that produced woven fabrics for interiors and garments using naturally colored yarns that the artisans had dyed themselves. There were no publications of ethnographic materials in this period, and practical instructions were usually compilations from previous issues, written by different authors. However, the practical instructions written by Ilga Madre stood out as an exception. She was a skillful dyer who shared her personal experience in articles appearing in the supplements to the women's magazine *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* [Soviet Latvian Woman] and later in a book (Madre 1990). All of these texts published in the Soviet press documented the activities in the area of natural dyeing: several handicraft groups practiced natural dyeing, and a number of lectures, masterclasses, and exhibitions were organized that were of great interest to the public. The authors of the texts reflected natural dyeing as a valuable inherited skill inspired by the local nature of Latvia; additionally, they emphasized the artistic qualities of the colors of naturally dyed yarns (Silma 1978; Ņefedova 1982; Kalniete 1983, etc.). In the Soviet era, traditional folk art and the beauty of Latvian nature had become symbols of Latvian identity and served as a way for people to maintain ethical and aesthetic ideals rooted in the Latvian cultural heritage.

This wave of interest in natural dyeing was promoted both by the political situation (the deterioration and stagnation of living conditions in all areas of life created a desire to resist) and the positive activities of certain individuals, for example, the amateur ethnographer, handcrafter, and dyer Madre. She was not only a skillful dyer and leader of the Atspole handicraft studio but also the author of a handbook on natural dyeing, as mentioned above. This book, which showed a very wide variety of color tones derived

from plant dyes (although the printing was of poor quality, as was the case with most Soviet-era publications), led to a widespread desire to practice this traditional craft. For many years, Madre's book remained the only handbook in the Latvian language on this topic, albeit a very popular one. Interest in traditional cultural heritage, including dyeing with plants, and knowledge about the local nature of Latvia was an element of the Latvian Third Awakening. Natural dyeing as a part of traditional craftsmanship, authentic folklore, folk costumes, an idealistic rural lifestyle, etc. were interpreted as real cultural values.

To sum up, the publications mentioning natural dyeing or dye plants studied here can be divided into several groups: (1) descriptions of ethnographic material with lists of dye plants and explanations of dyeing methods with reference to particular places in Latvia; (2) lists of dye plants and recipes without reference to their sources; (3) research articles in which information on the tradition of natural dyeing was collected, systematized, and analyzed; (4) informative reports regarding public activities in the field of natural dyeing; and (5) mentions of dye plants in publications on other topics.

In other words, written texts documented both practical information on dyeing and activities that reflected a living tradition, with much remaining however outside the press publications. The significance of these published texts for the development of the natural dyeing tradition can be understood from other sources, for example, from a survey conducted in the present day.

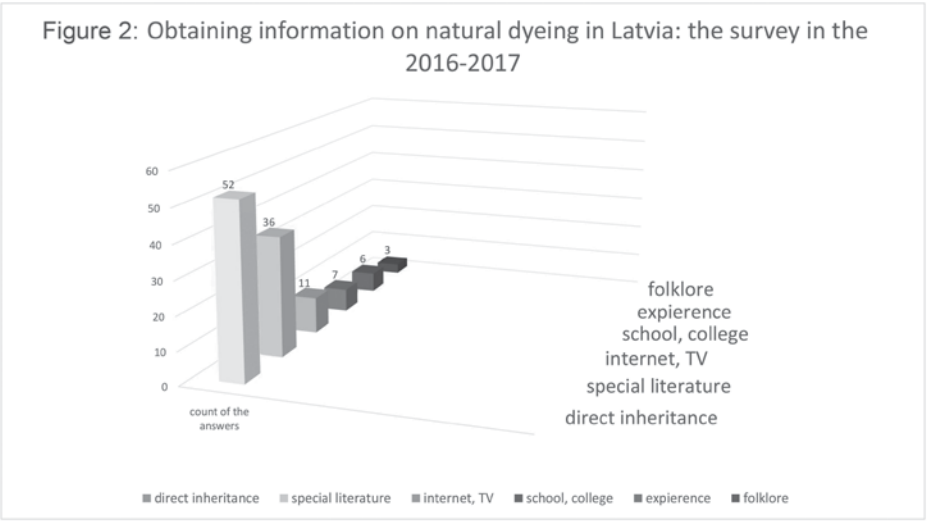
2016 –2017 Survey

In order to study the tradition of using natural dyes today, in 2016 and 2017, I carried out a survey among dyeing workshop participants in different regions of Latvia. The workshops were public events that often took place in an open-air museum area, so the participants as well as casual museum visitors were asked to complete the questionnaires. Due to various circumstances, not all participants completed the questionnaires. Nevertheless, responses from a total of ninety-eight respondents were used in the study. Because it is mainly women who are interested in natural dyeing, more of them participated in the workshops than men; there were only six men among the survey respondents (active dyers as well as casual observers). Moreover, the men's answers were similar to those of the women, with no particular differences in content or otherwise.

The majority of respondents were between the ages of forty and sixty, although the youngest ones were only twelve and fifteen years old, respectively, and the oldest was seventy-nine. Accordingly, most of the respondents were born between the late 1950s and the 1980s. Among the workshop participants were both masters of dyeing with a long experience and persons without any experience. However, the aim for everybody was to both improve existing knowledge and acquire new information. While the results of the survey allow the main trends in the development of the tradition of using dye plants in Latvia today to be identified, dyeing workshop participants are only a part of the people actively interested in the field.

The questionnaire *Pētījums par krāsaugu lietojuma tradīciju* [Study of the Tradition of Using Plant Dyes] comprised twelve questions.[6] These included basic personal information about the respondent and issues related to various aspects of the use of plant dyes. The answers fell into several categories that could not be anticipated, because the questions were open-ended.

This paper analyzes one of the questions in more detail, because, in the context of heritage-making, the source where the knowledge about natural dyeing came from is relevant. The visualization of the survey



results allows a better understanding of the different ways in which information is obtained today (Fig. 2). In addition, the respondents were able to indicate more than one source on this issue. However, six participants in the survey did not respond to this question.

The sources of information mentioned in the answers to the questionnaire can be divided into six main groups. These are direct inheritance, specialized literature, the internet and television, the education system, personal experience, and folklore. There is a big gap between the first two groups and the rest. The most common way to gain knowledge about natural dyeing was through direct transmission, meaning information was obtained from other dyers. Usually these were older relatives, such as one's mother, grandmother, aunt, etc., or craftspeople in a hobby group. In several cases, knowledge of natural dyeing was also obtained from a neighbor. It can be emphasized that the relatives who had dyeing skills were always women, but some of the craftspeople were also men—such as the weaver and dyer Māris Maniņš, who leads the Rīdzene craft studio. The respondents mentioned eight studios that operated during the Soviet era and are still active today. The direct transmission of dyeing skills from master to apprentice was also realized by attending public masterclasses and summer schools run by experienced natural dyers. Consequently, it can be stated that knowledge of natural dyeing is nowadays acquired not only from relatives but also public groups and events.

The second most common way to obtain knowledge in this field was from specialized literature, namely, articles in handicraft or women's magazines and Madre's above-mentioned book (1990). Specific publications were only occasionally quoted. For example, respondents indicated the magazines *Zeltene* [Latvian Maiden] and *Atpūta* [Rest] published between the two world wars during Latvia's period of independence, and *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* published during the Soviet occupation. In reality, *Atpūta* had only one article about natural dyeing (Pāvuliņa 1935), but the women's magazine *Zeltene* published a considerable amount of information. However, the magazine ran no documental publications of ethnographic materials, although it did publish Jānis Niedre's interpretation of fieldwork descriptions stored at the museum and in his private collection (Niedre 1931). It also published several articles with practical instructions and lists of dye plants, complemented by poetic descriptions of the

Latvian natural dyeing tradition (Retels 1927; Liepiņa 1931; Niedra 1938). These interpretations written by cultural workers during Latvia's period of independence influenced the level of knowledge of natural dyeing. The survey respondents also remembered articles published in *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete*, although the magazine in fact ran only two articles (Madre and Ošiņa 1979; Madre 1984)—the latter published in three installments. Likewise, Madre's book was very popular and was mentioned several times by name and title, as well as only descriptively. As shown by the survey data, these written texts have played an important role in the development of the natural dyeing tradition. So, the publications on the topic increased the public's interest in natural dyeing, and, moreover, the textbook on natural dyeing was actively used many decades after its publication.

There were also a number of other ways in which people obtained information about natural dyeing, which the respondents mentioned both separately and in addition to direct transmission and specialized literature. However, all these information sources were much less popular than the first two sources. One of them was the internet, as well as television in a few cases. It should be noted that the internet was used as a source of information more by middle-aged people but not so much by the youngest respondents, as one could have presumed. The internet was used to gain or supplement knowledge of natural dyeing by female and male respondents aged forty-one to fifty-two, as well as by one respondent aged sixty-two. Although they did not mention the particular internet sources consulted, there are a number of groups on Facebook and elsewhere on the internet that focus on natural dyeing. This indicates that electronic media do play a role in the spread of craft skills.

According to the survey, expertise in natural dyeing was also obtained or supplemented through schools. The respondents mentioned several high schools and universities: the Riga Secondary School of Applied Art (nowadays the Riga School of Design and Art), the Art Academy of Latvia, the University of Latvia, and Riga Technical University. These educational institutions offer no special courses in natural dyeing; instead, the acquisition of these skills is a personal interest of some teachers, which was also the case in the past.

Craft skills were developed also through experimentation and trial and error. Although not many people used this method as their main way of acquiring skills in natural dyeing, it nevertheless illustrates the creative potential of crafts. Personal experience is an essential and integral part of the acquisition of knowledge in traditional crafts, as no profession can be acquired only in theory. However, there may be several levels of experimentation depending on a person's goals and objectives.

Folklore was the source of information mentioned least often. It should be explained, however, that Latvian folk songs contain quite explicit information about natural dyeing. They mention several dye plants—such as bedstraw (*Galium* sps.), marjoram (*Origanum vulgaris* L.), woad (*Isatis tinctoria* L.), and others—as well as the particular process of dyeing with woad according to Latvian folklore (for more information, see Karlsone 2012, 2014). Respondents who were interested in natural dyeing as a part of Latvian cultural heritage were also familiar with the folklore tradition. Both of these elements were used in the creation of Latvian national identity.

The diagram shows that natural dyeing is still an inherited craft, as the direct transfer of knowledge from master to apprentice is the main way of obtaining knowledge and information in this field. Together with lived experience, the theoretical approach also plays an important role in the development of the tradition. The presence of written texts since the end of the nineteenth century has influenced the dynamics of natural dyeing

to the present day. The survey shows that a variety of sources have been and continue to be used for acquiring expertise in natural dyeing.

Conclusions

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sources used in this study allows us to conclude that natural dyeing as an element of Latvian cultural heritage has been documented and interpreted in written texts since the end of the nineteenth century. The first texts consisted of publications in the Latvian press that were used in the process of heritage-making to highlight special values of traditional skills. These publications drew readers' attention to the fact that dyeing with natural dyes was not simply an outdated technology as opposed to the use of aniline dyes, but it was a value to be preserved, treasured knowledge inherited from our ancestors. Regular documentation of information on natural dyeing began only after the First World War, in the 1920s. These were descriptions of ethnographic fieldwork, which were further partially used as material for articles appearing in the Latvian press. The authors of these articles interpreted the ethnographic records according to their educational levels and interests. However, the texts published in the Latvian press during this time influenced public opinion on natural dyeing as a particular Latvian craft and an ancient, inherited skill. Moreover, natural dyeing was included in the curricula at handicraft, home-economics, and agricultural schools. The press publications reflected a variety of public activities in the field and encouraged their further development.

Intangible cultural heritage, and natural dyeing skills in particular, was used as a resource to improve everyday life in times of crisis during the two world wars, and press publications were a significant tool to realize this goal. The use of traditional knowledge during the First World War was documented in the ethnographic fieldwork records held at the NHML, while the situation before and during the Second World War can be understood through texts in the Latvian press, as well as from ethnographic records held at the REM ILH UL.

The situation changed during the Soviet occupation, when natural dyeing was popularized very little in the press. It was not until the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s, when the topicality of Latvian cultural heritage increased, that information about natural dyeing appeared in the press again. Publications were used to maintain Latvian national awareness and identity.

Publications have been useful in maintaining the relevance of traditional craft knowledge. Written texts have directly influenced the living tradition of natural dyeing, and the intangible cultural heritage today includes a living tradition that is constantly changing. The archival texts are currently being used for research and educational purposes, but also in the dyeing practice, including by small businesses. Moreover, cultural heritage has played a significant role in the construction of identity in the past and continues to do so today. One such example is the folk costume, still in use today at various cultural events as one of the Latvian national symbols, whose making involves a set of traditional skills and knowledge, including dyeing.

Acknowledgements

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NOTES

1. The first expeditions with the aim of collecting ethnographic material about Latvians were organized by the Imperial Society of Friends of Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography from Moscow University in 1869 and in the following years.

2. Although this last statement is not always true.

3. On May 15, 1934, the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis was established as a result of a military coup. Ulmanis' reign (1934–40) was characterized by a highly nationalist policy.

4. The first period of Soviet occupation was from July 17, 1940 to June 22, 1941, when the Nazi German army invaded Latvia.

5. In September 1944, the Latvian capital of Riga was again occupied by Soviet army units, and the Nazi occupation regime was replaced by a second Soviet occupation lasting until 1990.

6. For more information on the survey as a whole, see Karlsone (2019).

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-----. 1942b. "Daži krāsaugi vācami arī rudenī" [Some dye-plants can also be collected in autumn]. *Mana Māja*, September 25.

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Ileana Řincu a Zadaní

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The Amur Fishermen: Their Mythical History in the Oral and Written Dimensions

Olga Vl. Maltseva
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography SB RAS (Novosibirsk), Russia
olymals@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Before the 1930s, the peoples who inhabited the Amur region located in Eastern Russia transmitted traditional information only orally within their groups. That accumulated knowledge was a fundamental cornerstone for their mental world and mainly reflected the social processes that had been unfolding in the large river valley. The *Three Suns* Nanai cosmogony legend, which tells the story of the three suns that melted and scorched the Earth, is a good example for understanding the local history. The basic myth is split into several actions, forming independent subplots with separate characters and their behaviors. The branched storyline of the legend confirms the specific migratory processes that used to take place within the Amur territory. The new communities embedded their family stories into the *Three Suns* common myth. In that way, the migrators harmonized their lives with their world model, i.e., with the mythical universe seen as the otherworld where shamans sent only righteous human souls.

Since the 1930s, with the spread of written language, the Amur natives have developed a new culture code which was created not by the older generation who still followed the oral tradition, but by the literate persons among them. Their entire folklore heritage was given a different conceptual design and began to be understood within world history. The local archaeological artefacts dating back to the third millennium BC were interpreted through the mythic narrative. Thanks to this discovery, a Russian-language simplified version of the legend was created which was accessible to a wide audience.

Nowadays we witness the emergence of a new mythical history originating from this written version. Linking the legend to the archaeological sites makes the Lower Amur peoples' history significantly older. According to modern understanding, the local history begins not with mythical events, but with a reconstructed picture of ancient social life embedded in the Earth's topography and chronology.

KEYWORDS

The Amur peoples; fishermen; orality; literacy; history.

Introduction

The narratives of most ethnic minorities occupy a certain niche in the contemporary multilingual and multinational environment. Special attention should be paid to the oral heritage of hunter-fishers' communities as societies that have preserved their attachments to particular places. Their legends were able to endure, indicating social dynamics. The historical and social background of Siberian territory reveals the existence of diverse cultures there. One of these melting pots was the eastern outskirts of Siberia where taiga nomads migrated. In the northern part of the Pacific coast, they assimilated to the local sedentary fishermen (Image 1). The cultural impact of Siberian foot hunters and reindeer herders extended to the Lower Amur River

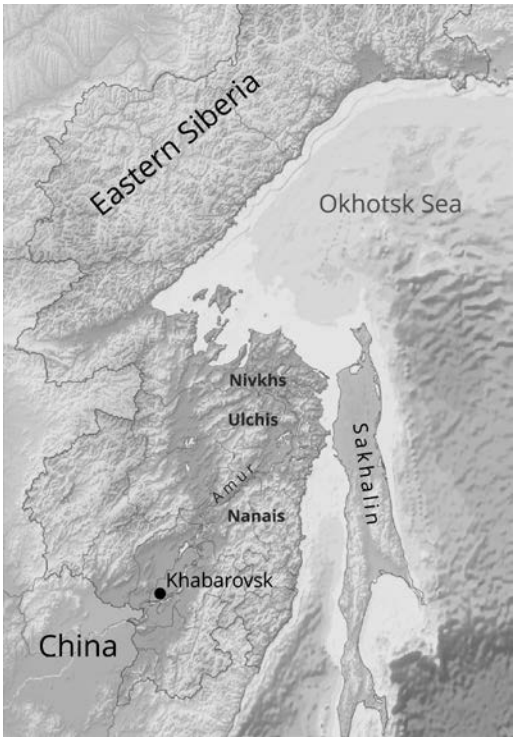

Image 1: The territory of settlements of the Amur peoples (Nivkhs, Ulchis, Nanais).

district populated by native tribes of river fishermen. The results of archaeological and linguistic research in the Amur River valley threw some light on the colonization of that territory. According to data from several researchers, Siberian Tungus-speaking tribes might have come across the Amur Paleo-Asiatic (or Paleo-Siberian) natives in the second millennium BC (Okladnikov 1968: 25-42; Vasilevich 1969: 260; Shavkunov 1990: 29; Smolyak 1980: 260-66). Further, some researchers emphasized that in ancient times the Amur Valley's settlers also had close cultural relations with the population of the Southern Pacific coast. Elements of Austronesian culture (typical of Vietnam and Southern China regions) penetrated the Amur peoples' lifestyle and manifested in their pile buildings construction, tiger cult, and some mythic plots (Okladnikov 1971; Shanshina 2000). For a long time, the Amur territory was under Chinese and Manchu dominance which made a profound impact on the lives of Amur locals. Since the nineteenth century, the Lower Amur River territory has been a part of Russia (Lin 1934: 1-27).

Considering those historical and social events, we can thus assume that the culture of Amur peoples evolved by integrating components from other geographical areas. Its composition consists of the primary (archaic) layer, which originated within the local fishing community, and external cultural forms and elements. The cross-cultural features have primarily shown in the Lower Amur oral heritage that combines myths belonging to Paleo-Asiatic and Tungus-Manchurian populations. Nivkh folklore, which has been preserved among the local residents of the Amur Estuary part, is particularly useful for researchers. Nivkh narratives have absorbed much of the mythical heritage of the Amur archaic communities. The Tungus-speaking peoples (such as Nanais and Ulchis), which reside in the proximity of the Nivkh, have inherited the oral folk arts of Siberian migrators and Asian agrarians. In spite of the fact that the Estuary and "upriver" populations distinguish themselves by their ancestral lineages and languages, both societies were built on fishing traditions and used non-literate forms of communication for a long time.

Oral heritage of the Amur peoples remains poorly studied mainly because part of the archaic forms of local cultural heritage were lost during the Soviet era with its atheistic ideology. Some surviving folklore texts have been subjected to literary processing. Nowadays we can discuss the local narratives using accounts by indigenous writers and folklorists. We are basically dealing with scattered stories brought together and arranged in a certain order, according to literary plots. Missing links in the local oral heritage generate debates in academia about whether folk epics ever existed among the Amur natives.

One of the subjects of dispute is the Nivkh legend *Ykh-mif*, which was recorded by the

Nivkh writer Vladimir Sangi in 1974. A book version of that legend, with a detailed plot, has reached us. The question remains open whether Sangi's masterpiece combines distinct stories or contains one general legend (Sangi 1981: 416-34; Khazankovich 2007). *Three Suns*, another legend (myth), is no less interesting. Spread over a wide geographical area, it was noted among the Sakhalin and Amur Nivkhs, Amur Nanais, and Ulchis. The Russian ethnographer Petr Shimkevich first published the legend in his paper on Nanai shamanism (1896). Next, the American anthropologist Berthold Laufer recorded the mythical story during his Amur expeditions in 1898 and 1899 (1899, 1900). We can also find evidence of it in Lopatin's (1922), Sternberg's (1933), and Smoliak's (1976, 1991) works. Their transcribed stories differ in details, possibly indicating that the legend might have been recorded from various storytellers. We can assume that different variants of the *Three Suns* legend coexisted within the Amur area. Shternberg assumed that some events of the legend plot could have originated in agricultural communities of Southeast Asia. It is of both historical and cognitive interest to trace how agrarian cultural elements entered and transformed fisher communities. The authenticity of the Amur narratives can hardly be ascertained after such a long time. However, detailed textual analysis of these local mythical stories can help us reconstruct the oral dimension of the taiga and Pacific fishermen who only recently acquired a written history.

The Amur Fisherfolk: Contents of Their Oral Traditions

The literary versions of the two myths—*Ykh-mif* and *Three Suns*—allow us to recreate the mental world of the Amur fishermen. Their plots and contexts correspond to stories preserved in the folk oral memory and reproducible over many generations. These storylines include events that occurred in mythical times and relating to the origins of human beings. The Nyvkh legend *Ykh-mif* consists of a cycle of stories where the main character *Ykh-nivng* fights evil entities, travels through the heavenly worlds, and frees people of malevolent spirits. The legend of *Three Suns* tells us about the times when the three suns in the sky made the Earth sizzling hot, and one man (or spirit) killed two of the suns. Despite the fact that the stories involve supernatural events, they reflect the earthly plane at a basic level. This aspect is manifest in all hunter-gatherer communities. We can actually define their oral creativity as environmental and bound to certain places. Many mythical stories record the details of the land which are important for fishermen and hunters. The extraordinary events in these narratives happen on the seashore or riverbank, or in the wooded area, which are presented as a backdrop.

The *Three Suns* myth (legend) is of particular interest for understanding how living space was organized. The echoes of this legend can be discovered in the Nanai toponymy. There are some places connected to the mythic events. The first site revered by Amur fishermen is located on the Emoron canal. It consists of two stones personifying an old man *Mapa* and an old woman *Mama.* Passing fishermen would usually ask them for good luck fishing and a fair wind (Bel'dy 2000: 81). The second one, a stone personifying an old woman, *Mama hureny*, is located near the Nanai settlement Sikachi-Alian (Bel'dy 2000: 84). The boulders covered in petroglyphs, which have been found on the riverbank near Sikachi-Alian, tell a cosmogony story too. Similar main characters are mentioned in these toponymic legends, namely *Mama, Mama hureny*, or *Delo mama.* The same character is found in the *Three Suns* myth. The versions recorded by Laufer and Sternberg read: "The water

Image 2: The woman shows off her wedding outfit with the embroidered ancestral tree and bird *Kori* (the images are placed on both sides of the back of the robe and enclosed in scaly ornaments). Photo by A. Maltsev, 2011.

covered the Earth. Three swans dived in and pulled out some land that gradually grew. There were three suns burning everything. The hero named Khado killed two suns with two shots. His wife named Mameldgi became the Creator of the Underworld (*Buni*). She painted figures with her finger on the rocks, telling of those events" (Laufer 1899: 749-50; Sternberg 1933: 455).

Admittedly, the mythic person *Mama* (*Mameldgi*) could contain an archetypal element dating back to pre-literate times. The image actualizes the Primordial Essence, the Mother archetype, and the Amur fishermen associated it with the patroness of fish riches and a friendly wind. Various cultures share the cosmogony plot of the feminine force involved in the inception of the universe. The most important part of the legend includes a description of the tree of life. This plot has been recently recorded and converted to a written format. According to the storyline presented in Kubanova's publication (1992: 141-3),

> "Having killed two suns, the mythic hero Khado (Guaranta) was returning home through the land of dead when he saw on his way a huge tree reaching the sky. There were small birds sitting in the crown of this tree. There were so many of them they blocked out the sun when they flew up. The tree bark was covered with frogs, snakes and boas. The tree leaves looked like metal mirrors, and fruits also grew on them."

This narrative image of the tree of life functioned in both the ritual sphere and everyday life. It symbolized the *axis mundi* (or the cosmic pillar) around which the lower, middle and upper worlds were built (Eliade 1959a: 34-8). In general, the Nanai people correlated the tree of life with a marriage model, the continuity of generations, and genealogy. Therefore, it is not surprising that this object entered women's art and became an ornamental motif of women's outfits (Image 2). A heavenly ancestral tree embroidered on the back of a woman's wedding dress references a mythical reality and expresses the idea of reincarnation. According to the traditional worldview, the roots of this tree denote bygone generations and the branches, descendant families, and the tree trunk represents the continuity of generations. It is especially worth highlighting that birds sitting on the tree branches symbolize the souls of unborn children. They fly down and enter a woman's womb where they metamorphose into her children's mortal souls.

The next detail to be distinguished in the ornamental ancestral tree is a bird sitting on the treetop. It depicts the mythic bird *Kori* which is also related to the cosmogony. The plot that includes *Kori* constitutes a separate branch in the mythical history. This character personifying the firebird was both a benevolent and a malevolent entity. On the one hand, it was the patron of women and childbirth; on the other hand, it was a shamanic spirit with destructive powers. It dragged people away and burned everything in its path. The mythical events associated with it left a trace on particular pieces of land. These memorable places located along the Devyatka River consist of a split hill, a hill slope, and a hill bottom; they allegedly contain evidence of the *Kori* falling down. According to local legend, a celestial bride *Pudin* split the hilltop in two with her cutting board while trying to kill the firebird (modern storytellers called it the devil, which indicates the transformation that the legend underwent) (Maltseva 2018: 69). *Kori* rolled down the slope covered with trees and scorched it. It fell on a flat place at the bottom of the hill and burnt down everything around it. This spot where the mythic bird died has become known as "the place of fathers" related to the *Samande* family bloodline. Sternberg cited another *Kori* tale in his work. According to it, an archer on the Khyktsir cliff (located near the city of Khabarovsk) mortally wounded the bird with an arrow. The bird flew to the

Gorin river (the tributary of the Amur River which the Devyatka flows into) and died there. People gathered at that place, they decided to cook the bird and divide its meat among themselves. The Daxsur (Zaksor) family got the back of the bird's knee; the Byldy, the upper part of its knee; the Tumali, its chest; the Oninka, its back, and the Xyzyr (Khodger), its abdomen (Sternberg 1933: 503).

This fragment illustrates how the mythic events resonated with the Nanai families' life, allowing us to look at the mythical history from a different angle. The bonding between mortal beings and their cosmic ancestors comes to the fore in it. Returning to the general myth about the three suns, we should focus on its main characters who allegedly launched ancestral bloodlines of the Nanai peoples. The Zaksor, Khodzer, Kile, and Oninka Nanai families considered the mythic figures *Khado* and *Miameldi* to be their families' ancestors (Smoliak, 1976: 133-4, Sternberg 1933: 493-5). Besides, each of them claimed ownership of the legendary past. This emphasis on kinship with the celestial entities was clearly expressed in the diversity of storylines and heroes of the cosmogony myth. Each of the Nanai clans had its own version of the legendary plot where *Khado* and *Miameldi* had different statuses. We find such various statuses of the main characters in the early folklore material collected in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Laufer's version, *Khado* killed two suns, and his daughter *Mameldgi* became the creator of the Underworld (*Buni*) (Laufer 1899: 749-50). According to Shimkevich's version, *Dolchu-Khoday* unnecessarily shot two suns and two moons. He became a mortal person and the first shaman (Shimkevich 1896: 9-10). On the contrary, Sternberg highlighted that *Khado* was only the Polar Star, and two suns were shot by *Miameldgi* or *Guaranta* (Sternberg 1933: 492-5). These inconsistencies in storylines can be explained not only by the personal interpretations of the cosmogony myth that researchers have encountered. It can be assumed these versions were inherited in the storytellers' families. Such variable details also indicate the heterogeneity of the Nanai society. New settler groups embedded their family stories into the common cosmogony myth thus branching and detailing it. These various components of the oral story are built into the narrative skeleton, which reproduces the construction of the universe. The *Three Suns* myth has been modified over time. Here are the key moments of the story:

(1) At the bottom of the tree of life, a man was sitting with his back firmly stuck to the tree trunk. Guaranta separated him from the tree trunk, and then he gathered the tree leaves and fruit in his caftan and went home together with the rescued man.

(2) At home, once Guaranta undid his caftan, the leaves and fruit flew up and began vanishing through a hole in the house wall. In order to retain them, Guaranta decided to plug that hole with his caftan. He attached some leaves and fruit to his clothes to obtain divine power.

(3) The newcomer became Guaranta's son-in-law by marrying his daughter, Durulda. They had a son who grew up, then got sick and died. The soul of the deceased son suffered because it could not get to the next world. Durulda tried to help her son. She went up the road of the dead and got to the gate, which was blocked by her father's caftan. Durulda freed the gate removing that caftan from it. Since then, people don't stay on earth when they die, mortal souls pass through that gate to the underworld (Buni).

These plots mention iconic figures of the Nanai's mental world, which include archetypes that are typical of most traditional cultures. Folk models of the world consist of trees of life; men guarding portals to the underworld; heroes who become ancestors of human beings. These anchors of many folklore plots reveal the mnemonic and ceremonial significance of the oral text (Eliade 1959b; Levi-Strauss 1955; Lotman 1990: 34-72, 103, 225-56). The Nanai shamans used the mythic story in their shamanic chant called *diaringha nimga* to see off souls to the afterlife. The shaman associated himself with the main hero *Hado* (or *Durulda)* who, according to the story, received a gift in the form of leaves and fruit. The decoration on the shamanic outfit was a reference to the mythic time. Metallic mirrors (*toil*) attached to the shamanic outfit and a pommel (*tondor*) for his headdress symbolized the mythic leaves and fruit. The shaman used the chant like a tool for controlling spirits and navigating among them, chanting and sound design playing an important part in it. In reenacting the mythic cosmos, he resorted to non-verbal techniques, using visual-tactile and acoustic images, pantomime, and onomatopoeia. This type of vocal and theatrical performance was reserved for birth and death ceremonies. The Nanai families would invite strong shamans when their relatives died.

We should emphasize the social and ethical roles of narrative in the Amur communities. For different families of Nanai, ancestral legends were necessary in order for them to harmonize their relatives' lives with a common space order. The legend was a standard by which the assessment of the human souls was made. The legendary created world was an ideal. It represented the construction of the underworld (*Buni*), to which the shaman as the main censor sent off only righteous souls. The souls of the drowned, of those killed by wild animals were not worthy of such seeing off. The locals and migrants thus asserted their positions by inscribing their own stories into the common cosmogonic legend, and the shaman as the main ceremonial person oversaw that process.

This leads us to maintain that pre-literate heritage of the Amur peoples is multifunctional. Rooted in archaic times, their stories revolve around spatial landmarks, social organization, ethical and esthetical standards. The Amur narratives appealed to an invisible space consisting of the otherworld and a spiritual environment. The cornerstone of the oral storytelling was an arrangement of the earthly reality to reflect the order of the universe where an ancestral story had a more manifest nature. Consequently, the Amur communities tried to follow the "cosmic-ancestral" commandments under the supervision of the shamans as main keepers of the oral stories and censors monitoring human behavior.

The Amur Fishermen's Oral Traditions: Socio-linguistic Aspect and Sacred Writing

Among the Amur fishermen, oral traditions were maintained through inter-generational communication. Despite the fact that members of the same clan could live in different parts of the Amur area, they represented a close-knit community in the ideological and ceremonial sphere. Unlike the Amur Nivkh people living compactly in the Amur Estuary, the Nanai and the Ulchi clans didn't occupy separate territories for living. They led a semi-sedentary lifestyle existing by salmon fishing. Studies have shown that settlements of the Amur fishermen were not long-term due to the depletion of some fishing areas next to which people settled (Smoliak 1975: 150–68). Adverse factors forced them to migrate to other places profitable for fishing. People could move out both with the entire ancestral clan and just part of it. In the new place, migrators

joined early settlers or their community incorporated other newcomers.

Among the Tungus-Manchu peoples living along the Amur River, the formation of clans was regulated by certain ethical standards that have been defined as the *dokha* institution (Maltseva 2019: 136-8; Smoliak 1975: 76-9). According to those rules, two local communities formed an alliance becoming a single exogamous clan, with a donor group adopting the name of a recipient group. In that way, large mixed clans appeared in the Amur Valley such as the Samar and Bel'dy Nanai clans. They grew over time adopting new territorial groups. Members of the kinship community had to fulfill certain responsibilities, for example, to provide mutual assistance in fishing, to observe exogamy rules, and jointly participate in religious ceremonies (Sem 1959: 14-7). This social phenomenon became the subject of debate among academic researchers. Some of them maintained that the *dokha* relationships were concluded between kinship groups of a single clan to prevent incest (Sem 1959: 17; Tugolukov 1972). Others held the point of view that there was no genetic connection between the adopted and adopting groups (Smoliak 1975: 130).

Beyond these debatable positions, the question of the continuity of oral traditions within Nanai communities remains open. The oral heritage of each consolidated clan could develop in two directions—smaller adopted groups added their family stories to the shared ancestral legend, or the groups maintained the shared one as was. In both cases, we should consider that any Nanai clan was a socio-religious organization whose cosmogony legend tied all members of the community together into a whole. In the Amur River valley, when a blood kinship community was fragmented, and its parts were scattered over a vast territory, the following could be seen: they acquired new ethnonyms in the new places. In connection with the fact that the Amur anglers kept a semi-nomadic lifestyle, the question is how they managed to preserve the storylines of legends for a long time. The structure of a cosmogony legend includes a stable core and variable elements. The social context shows that each clan community consisted of indigenous members and accepted new members who could influence the legendary history.

Researchers of the late nineteenth century noted that the Amur peoples adhered to patriarchal customs and patrilineage. This type of society was typical for Siberian peoples leading the lifestyle of hunters and reindeer herders. It has been suggested that both Siberian (Tungus) components and patrilineal kinship could have appeared on the Amur territory after the seventeenth century (Khasanova 2007: 186-7; Shrenk 1899: 3–6). Matrilineality had existed in the Amur peoples' environment before that time (Tugolukov 1972: 111-2). The plots of the *Three Suns* myth about the rebirth of souls and the patroness of fish stock could point to the ancestor's possibly being female. Contemporary ethnographic evidence confirms the importance of women for the transmission of ancestral stories. For example, among Nanais living along the Gorin and Devyatka rivers, keepers of the cosmogony myth were Ekaterina Samar and her aunts Kseniia Digor and Maria Tumali, who was also a shaman woman. Also, among the Amur Nanai, women conducted shamanic ceremonies alongside men. However, women-shamans could not perform a funeral rite. Men were always chosen as strong shamans who sent mortal souls on their last path. Strong shamans would cater to the specific needs of the different Nanai groups. They could have the dead men's souls carried away in accordance with the Nanai clans' ideas—by deer, bear, or dog (Sem 1959: 14; Shimkevich 1896: 18).

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, a Nanai settlement represented a neighborhood community where settlers had different ancestors. They cooperated

during salmon fishing but kept their religious ceremonies separate, especially funeral rituals. The death of a member of the clan was reason for consolidating Nanai clan bonds. Members of the same clan got together and usually invited a shaman from another place; he was not always their kinsman. The main ceremonial person possessed not only the gift of entering the underworld, but also a large repertoire of ancestral legends helping him to choose a certain spiritual path.

The shamanic vocabulary needs to be paid special attention to. Some Nanai folklorists have faced difficulties in transcribing shamanic texts (Bulgakova 2016). Conventional language used in everyday communication was of no help in understanding the sacred world presented in the cosmogony myth. This suggests that languages of the Amur natives differed not only in origin, but also in functional use. Conversational languages of the Amur peoples (Nivkhs, Ulchis, and Nanais) reflect environmental specificities. For example, the Nanai language contains a large amount of words related to the water space and fishing activity. Some of these terms distinguish between different parts of the river system, such as, *da* (estuary), *ian* (main channel of a mountain river), *modan* (river bend), etc. (Onenko 1980: 130, 264, 542). Other groups of words express "locative relations"—approach the riverbank, walk along the beach, move away from the beach—and fish gender.

However, these natural concepts were poorly represented in local narratives related to the sacred sphere. In 1997 and 2001, the worship rites of the sacred places located along the river Devyatka were recorded. They were performed by members of the same family, who considered themselves part of the *Kevur* group of Nanais. The rites included sacrifices and the prayers contained cosmogony motives. This part of the prayers included archaic terms not found in the colloquial speech of the Nanais. Therefore, it was difficult for representatives of the modern Nanai generation to translate it. The ceremony participants told that *Mande* (Manchu) languages used to be employed in ritual activity. If we accept this fact, it becomes clear that Tungus-Manchu peoples of the Amur region used Manchu language in both trade activity and the sacred sphere. The members of the *Kevur* group claimed that they had partly Manchu origin (Maltseva, fieldnotes 1997, 2001). With the development of trade relations with Manchuria, the Tungus-language populations of the Amur area brought back brides from there. The Amur territory could have been culturally influenced by Southeast Asia through such marriages. Some studies of the *Three Suns* myth did not reject cultural interaction between natives of the Amur River and their agrarian southern neighbors in ancient times. The myth contains an episode that is not typical of a fishing society. According to it, "the main character was raised in a stable. He grew up among pigs at first, then among horses" (Shan'shina 2000; Stenberg 1933: 492-3). This fragment mentions animals, such as pigs and horses, which the Amur peoples did not use widely in their economy. Nonetheless, the pigs imported from China could be used for sacrifices. The Nanai community had been maintaining trade and cultural contacts with the north-eastern districts of China for over three centuries before the twentieth century. The locals had the opportunity to be acquainted with Chinese hieroglyphic writing during that period of time. Research has shown that the imported written language also acquired a sacred connotation. Hieroglyphic inscriptions made on rice paper or rectangular pieces of red cloth were extensively used in shamanic rituals. The written words and phrases generally performed a magical (protective) function. They defended ceremonial participants against malicious spirits, and some of them included written prayers to the taiga, water, and celestial deities (Bo 1995; Smoliak 1991: 97-8). Under the influence of the Taoist

tradition that existed among the Chinese and Manchus, the Amur peoples' model of the world was upgraded. The alteration was primarily introduced to the tree representing the axis of the world. In the updated cosmos, the treetop pierced and connected the nine heavens overseen by the goddesses—patronesses of constellations, towns, and childbirth.

From the second half of the nineteenth century on, the lower part of the Amur region was incorporated in the Russian Empire. That historical event forced changes in the local peoples' lives. Russian missionaries tried to introduce the native population to Orthodoxy. They created a Russian-Nanai dictionary and some tutorial books for that purpose. Those editions mostly contained the catechism and Christian prayers translated from Church Slavonic into the Nanai and Nivkh languages (Protodiakonov 1884, 1889). It was the first experience of developing a written language using Cyrillic for the Amur non-literate peoples. However, the great majority of the local peoples remained illiterate. The missionary alphabet stopped being used in teaching in 1906.

The situation in this area changed dramatically after the beginning of the twentieth century. The Russian Empire with its Christian Orthodox tendency was replaced by the Soviet Union state and its atheistic ideology. The reforms of the Soviet government also concerned indigenous languages of Siberia. The Nanai, Nivkh and Ulchi communities faced such lingual reforms, which were focused mainly on creating written languages for ethnic minorities. Another reform was implemented to consolidate nomadic or semi-nomadic tribal communities into ethnic groups that allowed authorities to control them. In that way, the indigenous populations of the Lower Amur region were divided into several ethnic groups. According to the 1926 census, Ulchis (723 people), Nanais (5,309 people), and Nivkhs (4,076 people) constituted the main indigenous populations living along the Amur (The All-Union Population Census of 1926). In the 1930s, a campaign was carried out to create written languages for these nationalities. The Nivkh alphabet was developed in 1931, the Nanai alphabet, in 1932. The Nanai language was also taught in Ulchi schools. At the beginning, alphabets were created on a Latin basis, and later (in 1937) they were converted into Cyrillic. The written languages, unlike the oral ones, were carefully structured. They had new lexical, grammatical and stylistic standards. This linguistic improvement revolutionized the Amur fishermen mentality.

The Effect of Literacy on the Oral Heritage of the Amur Nanais

Interviews with the Nanais indicated that the introducing of the writing system had actually remade their community. The literate people began to appear after the establishment of the Nanai written study program based on the Naichino-Torgon dialect (Gorelikov 2009). This dialect of the Amur group of Nanais has become generally accepted in education and communication. However, the spreading of a standard language has revealed the dialectal heterogeneity of the Nanai society. Various dialects had been preserved along the tributaries of the Amur River for a long time before the 1970s. In these districts, the official language was not easy to understand for the older generation. There were differences in phonetics and meanings of many words. The local children also felt uncomfortable to learn writing at school. They faced difficulties pronouncing some words and phrases through a system of written letters. According to elderly informants, they had to think in one language and read in another one. During this period of language policy, the younger generation fell out of the family traditions. The family split was expressed

in the fact that elders could not always understand their children who used complex sentences and new words.

It should be noted that the vocabulary of the Amur fishermen has changed significantly since the 1930s. The atheistic basis of education has led to the fact that the sacred sphere has lost its meaningfulness in the life of Amur locals. Along with that, a whole set of words related to shamanic traditions, the afterlife and the spiritual world has been removed from communication. In return, the terms associated with historical events, physical space, technology, and industries have appeared. Introducing new standards of living caused creolization of the local languages. A simplified language has appeared, which fulfilled all the basic communicative needs of the local community (Sidbury 2007; Stewart 2016).

Because of the linguistic metamorphosis, the weakening of the connection between the old and young generations has become noticeable. Monitoring of that situation has demonstrated the natives stopped taking the ancestral memory for granted. Shamanism no longer made an impact on the life of the Amur peoples, and as a result of it they stopped prioritizing the spiritual world. The structure of the Nanai cosmogony legend also underwent changes having lost its branching because the ancestral stories had ceased to be of primary importance.

Since the 1930s, the ancestral stories of the Amur peoples have also existed within the literary and historical spheres, which contributed to a change in their storylines and transmission. During that period, indigenous people with post-secondary education became translators and narrators of ethnic knowledge. The following event also determined the future of the legend of the three suns. Okladnikov's archaeological discoveries made a huge impact on the content of this legend, which has been since interpreted within the archaeological past. He made a connection between the cosmogonic myth, the Sikachi-Alyan petroglyphs, and ornamental patterns on ancient Amur pottery. In 1935, near the village of Voznesenovka, he found fragments of pottery decorated with stylized images resembling human faces or masks. According to his explanation, the fragments depicted the face of one of the mythical suns scorching the Earth. As for Sikachi-Alyan petroglyphs, Okladnikov used the local legend about the time when these boulders were in a molten state and one of the mythic characters painted figures with her finger on the soft rocks thus trying to perpetuate those events (Image 3). In fact, these archaeological discoveries associated with Okladnikov's name revolutionized the understanding of Nanai heritage. The Nanai reevaluated their collective spiritual experience. The Russian-language simplified and understandable version of the legend appeared then. It went beyond the local community thanks to its written textual form. Okladnikov's version of the legend is presented in his book *Faces of the Ancient Amur* and was included in the schoolbook used in Khabarovsk (Okladnikov 1968). It has thus become an element of documented history.

Image 3 : The Sikachi-Alyan petroglyph. Photo by A. Maltsev, 2008.

As they underwent social and cultural transformations, the natives changed their perception of themselves in the outside world. The notion of a vertical universe lost its impact on their lifestyle. The indigenous inhabitants of the Amur area no longer

conformed their lives to the shamanic principles. Their personal history unfolded not in a vertical projection, but in a horizontal one, and both personal and family lives were now deemed part of a linear history. We can see that history of ethnic groups also fitted into this outlook. On this timeline, some mythic events were connected to the life of specific communities. However, another picture emerges when scientific empirical knowledge competes with an irrational mystical experience. Numerous hypotheses and versions concerning the distant past create a gap that is filled by the transformed mythical heritage. According to modern native ideas, physical (official) history most likely determines trends in the mythical heritage and accordingly influences local history thus modifying it (Samar 2003).

According to the author's records, some locals interpret the legend as "ancient wisdom" in need of decoding, and a message to the future generation. They draw parallels with the folk material of other peoples (such as ancient Egyptians, Aztecs, Chuvash), where we can also find the same stories about three suns. This group of interpreters includes mainly representatives of the cultural elite (artists, writers). The legend also received a conceptual design in the form of the doctrine "about human races" who once inhabited the Earth (taken from Helena Blavatsky's theosophical philosophy), "the secret doctrine" of physical space, celestial bodies, and emergence of a human civilization.

The Amur Natives: Residual Orality through Private History

How legendary heritage seeped through into historical reality is especially visible in modern personal life stories which, in their diversity, keep traces not only of family values but also of mental patterns and state ideological forms. The elderly people with whom I conducted in-depth interviews often shared memories of their childhood and youth, and their parents' life stories. Some of them were educated people, and their family stories were highly detailed and attached to the historical background. They could rely on written records and draw parallels between their stages of life and historical facts. In that case, the informants used written language productively. They could find their bearings in the torrent of information to communicate, transmit and accumulate knowledge, and express their opinions.

However, the narrative of non-literate respondents needed specific analyzing. There were still people retaining residual orality among the Amur natives in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. Their speech activity should be considered as part of symbolic actions, which included, alongside sacred phrases, onomatopoeic and gestural acts to be expressed in rituals, iconic and mnemonic signs. According to their mental world, spiritual benevolent and malevolent creatures acted as invisible spectators and listeners at which all these means of self-expression should be primarily directed. Another specificity that the researcher encountered was the dualistic nature of the natives' lifeworld consisting of oppositions such as female-male, friend-foe, and permission-taboo.

Moreover, these binary oppositions, especially self-others, friend-foe, and permission-taboo, acquired new connotations in the context of the Soviet ideology that impacted the personal stories of the local illiterate population in a specific way. It was mainly displayed in the dividing of one's life into happy and unhappy periods. The bright period of their lives was linked to the Soviet society's successes and welfare. Accordingly, the personal narratives of that time included both socially approved narratives and deeply personal ones. The official part of the life history emphasized heroic, aesthetic and moral aspects of life, as

well as labor and creative growth, while the more personal part evoked the ancestors' past and traditional beliefs, and didn't always correspond to the official rhetoric. The plots could reflect the daily routine but also unreal events, which had allegedly occurred in an early fantastic "pre-Soviet" time. Those private narratives contrasting with commonly accepted ideas were sometimes exposed to rejection and even public censure. It resulted in some people concealing their family traditions. According to the surveys, the elderly interviewees hid their ancestral customs and camouflaged by correcting their own family stories to avoid censorship. Small groups outside the villages had been holding shamanic ceremonies and worshipping cults without making any public appearances throughout the Soviet era.

In the 1990s, conducting in-depth interviews with the Amur elderly people was still difficult because of this secrecy. The technical aspect of communication should also be noted. The respondents had to make sure that interviewers could be trusted and provided information about their personal lives in a fragmented and incoherent way in some cases. I have thus found that most natives followed certain rules in narrating their lives. Their family stories contained no details about their ancestors' daily lives—there was a taboo on pronouncing the parents' names and their biographical details. These gaps in the family histories were filled with unreal events having mythical content. It was a challenge to have them disclose this layer of the family narratives in routine communication. Watching the respondents' behavior in the circle of their neighbors, relatives, families and outsiders was subject to research. In two interviews that were recorded in the 1990s and early 2000s, informants used some means of ritual interaction.

During the meeting held in the Ulchi village of Bulava in 1992, the responder Mikhail Duvan, a hereditary *tudin* (a shaman's assistant), took some time to share

Image 4 : Mikhail Duvan (1903 (1911) – 1996)–Ulch *tudin* and narrator. Photo by G. Bulgakov, 1992.

his life story with us (Photo 4). After a lot of cajoling, Mikhail Duvan finally told about his life trajectory under the pretext that he was going to die soon, and so he would not be sorry to share his individual story. His narration was deeply modulated, similar to a vocal performance, and lasted for about fifteen minutes (Maltseva, fieldnotes 1992). Our first visit there took place in 1991, and at that time the informant had not yet felt an urge to tell his life story.

The second interview recorded among the Gorin Nanais in 2001 was also a kind of "message before dying." In that case, the author tried to obtain the information by participating in a worship ritual. The elderly Kseniia Digor decided to remember the course of her life during a final boat trip (Image 5 and 6). The ceremonial route passed


Figure 5 and 6 : Kseniia Digor, main informat during the research. Screenshots from a video, made by O. Maltseva

by several legendary spots located along the river Devyatka and ended on the river island Naan where Kseniia Digor had come from. She recalled her own life milestones in venerating the legendary places as vital to her (Maltseva, fieldnotes 2001).

Notably, these symbolic actions regarding private life observed some older communicative principles. They were typical of the transmission of accumulated life experience within the ancestral communities that consisted of blood relatives and adopted persons belonging to different families. It was reflected in how they constructed interaction between natives and outsiders. As far as Mikhail Duvan and Kseniia Digor were concerned, they preferred to be interviewed by involving their nieces, Nadezhda Duvan and Ekaterina Samar, who acted as interpreters for them. In that type of communication, the researcher was given the role of stranger (or outsider). I had to go through a sort of initiation ceremony to become closer to the family groups. The researcher managed to gain their trust using long-term communication and participating in their family events. While communicating they also demonstrated their commitment to some archaic ideas implying that the sacred world is embedded into the physical space. Mikhail Duvan and Kseniia Digor reconstructed that mental model using symbolic acts and chanted speech in their storytelling.

Here is the basic plot of Duvan's story-song titled *Hanina* Can [Happy/holy place]:

> *I was working hard on the ground driving a tractor/ While working, I had a heart attack and was hospitalized/ My soul left my body and ended up in the heavenly world/ That world sparkled and shimmered with unusual colors/* [part of his song was a description of the celestial world] *I saw my heavenly bride there/* [according to the Amur shamanic traditions, every shaman (*tudin*) has a heavenly bride] *Then I recovered and descended from heaven to earth/ I again found myself on this gray ground, and I had to dig into it and turn over stones again.*

This life story shows how oral traditions had been transformed in the context of historical events, linking the shamanic narrative and a subjective comprehension of reality. Mikhail conveyed his personal experiences in that vocal performance that used a modern tune. The melody of his story-song could be often heard during performances of amateur art groups.

Kseniia Digor introduced her lifeworld in a ritual form. In worshiping the sacred sites, which personified *a horse and foals, a dog and*

puppies, a heavenly bride, she was addressing her ancestors.

These views of the world that shared the idea of a vertical universe were used as the skeleton for constructing the story of their individual life. Both Mikhail Duvan and Kseniia Digor saw the end point of their lives in the reenactment of the cosmic order. Mikhail expressed it in his description of the heavenly world. Kseniia's goal to visit Naan (her birthplace) was also related to the design of the universe. According to her family's ideas, that place was linked to the invisible cosmic pillar which the ancestral dead souls used to climb to reach the Polar Star.

When working with such sources of the information, one encounters some cognitive and linguistic problems in decoding the information. Our survey showed that there could be some language gaps between the generations of the same family, and conventional language norms could not always be used to interpret these narratives combining modern and archaic elements. There were some difficulties in the accounts of Mikhail's and Kseniia's worldviews by their nieces. The nieces found it difficult to translate the obsolete words of Manchu, Ainu or Nivkh origin. This means that each Amur clan used to have a specific linguistic structure resulting from inter-ethnic marriages. To avoid being fully assimilated, these multicultural families became autonomous over time and worked out their own standards for communicating with each other. For example, Kseniia Digor, who belonged to the group of *Kondon* Samars, inherited the Manchu traditions that were expressed in her lifeworld along the female line. The mythic story associated with the local toponymical legends was inseparably bound to her family group. Another local group, the *Iamikhta* Samars with Tungus (Siberian) roots, hadn't had an opportunity to be involved in that mythical and ritual complex until today. From the interviews with Mikhail Duvan, it became apparent how selective he was in choosing his social circle. During our last visit to Bulava village, Mikhail Duvan preferred to use his relative as an interpreter, and not any outsider because he expected that a person belonging to a different family would not understand his language. However, he had to communicate with Svetlana Angin, a professional expert of the Ulchi language. The respondent was cautious and distrustful when interacting with a non-kin person.

The examples above show to what extent Amur natives' ancestral narratives differed from one another due to dialectal (linguistic) differences. Each family had its own legend.

Since Mikhail Duvan and Kseniia Digor passed away (they died in 1996 and at the end of 2001, respectively), their family stories have endured becoming general (public) legends. These transformed narratives entered the local history and festival practices becoming secular. We saw how the mythical part of Kseniia's family history was widely retold and used in festivities. Worshiping the objects on the Devyatka River has become part of the local festive events. Mikhail's life story has also been updated. Before he died, he had been to America and communicated with Native Canadians. However, his travelling outside the settlement received negative feedback from his neighbors. They considered his shamanic abilities were affected to the point of losing them, which meant his personal history had been devalued and had lost its sacred meaning.

The mythic content of family stories ceased to be relevant with the loss of family spiritual values. People preferred to focus instead on material conventional values, as shown by an interview recently recorded in the Nanai settlement of Sikachi-Alyan (Maltseva, fieldnotes 2011). I asked the old resident Evdokia Aktanko to share her memories. She was born in 1931, so her upbringing was not based on oral traditions, but she could have inherited behavioral patterns typical for pre-literate communities

from her parents. As it turned out, her narrative included textual information, from a Russian-language written version of the *Three Suns* Legend. She wouldn't let me read that text, she read it herself. That manner of communicating pointed to the preservation of some of the old traditions. In her mind, her own and her family histories began in mythic times. The fact that those distant events were preserved in the book was significant to her. The process of reading the book aloud was like a sacred act. That form of address is typical of an oral tradition, with the storyteller addressing the listeners. In this case, the chanted speech is key.

These examples illustrate residual orality as observed among the Amur native minorities recently. It was expressed in the purely private not public perception of one's own life. Similar life histories focused on mythic times and the vertical construction of the universe and at the same time reflected contemporary reality that echoed archaic concepts of the spiritual world. Studying the linguistic aspects of the biographical interviews helped us reveal the local cultural backgrounds that determined their contents. As noted, specific phrases and terms had been used specifically for describing the mythical universes. Each of the local kin communities had its own lexical set to express affection for its ancestral world. Those groups of words having a mnemonic function and providing information about the spiritual realm have been replaced with terms denoting physical objects since the dissemination of scientific knowledge among the natives. Currently, the Nanai language is undergoing processes of acquiring complex morphology and creolization at the same time, inspiring the locals to preserve their narrative heritage in a different way. We can see how written Russian and written Nanai have been promoting a new cultural code, entering the Nanais' family values and influencing their personal stories. Proceeding from there, the Amur family and individual narratives, as well as the local social history, are being updated with simplified Russian or literary Nanai texts.

Conclusion

The narrative legacy of the peoples living along the Amur River has taken shape within certain historical and environmental contexts that defined the specificity of its form and content. The traditional Nivkh, Ulchi and Nanai salmon fishing communities preserved their own oral histories within kinship groups. Their "primary orality" lasted for a long time before the twentieth century, being passed on for many generations. The continuity of the oral traditions of natives was based on maintaining their family stories where ancestors played prominent roles. Some of the families' tales entered the general cosmogonic legend whose foundation was created from the plexus of local and early imported believes. Analyzing the *Three Suns* Nanai myth (legend) has shown that its primary layer was related to a patroness of the water element. Having been in the making for a long time, the storyline of the legend had absorbed some plots from South Asian narratives. The branched legend storyline also reflects cultural processes that took place in the Amur River area and indicates that the groups of migrants embedded their own family stories in the structure of the local legend. In doing so, they appealed to the cosmic order and emphasized their importance in the lay of a new land. The legendary content had deeply symbolic significance for the natives and new settlers. The concepts of the spiritual world are reenacted through the attachment to particular places, in rituals, and ornamentation. The mythical history of the Nanai presented in the *Three Suns* myth, especially as replicated in funeral rites, held the key idea of recreating the

mythical universe, with its upper and lower heavens, and a vertical axis running through them, connecting the past and the future. The connotation of the vertical universe is couched in mythological imagery—the tree of life, multilevel worlds, and the sacred itineraries of mythical heroes. Shamanic traditions made a huge impact on the legend and transformed it. Now the main character not only embodied an ancestor but was also associated with a shaman. As the main ceremonial performer, the shaman oversaw the afterlife ceremony and tracked the movements of human souls in the spiritual world.

Since the 1930s, the mythical history of the Amur fishermen moved on to the next stage of its development. From then on, generational memory and shamanic ideas stopped being meaningful as the transfer of knowledge in writing gained prominence. Educated people, who replaced shamanic figures, determined the criteria for maintaining the oral heritage. Consequently, they introduced a materialistic worldview to the local peoples. The indigenous ancestral stories were put into book format and significantly simplified. The locals' world model was also transformed, from a vertical to a horizontal ordering of the world, meaning that historical events were used to upgrade the mythical stories. The mythic past was linked to a linear history and interpreted to understand the mental world of ancient people. In this context, the attachment of mythical history to the earthly plane became the most relevant in turning memorable legendary places into tourist attractions. Events of the scientific (linear) history were also reflected in life stories, gradually displacing the mythical reality from the natives' mental world. Nowadays, we can observe residual orality within the context of life history. It is expressed in the reproducing of some archaic ideas and ritual forms of communication. Its specificity is characterized by its coexistence with ideological principles and literacy.

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(Informant Ks. Digor, 1915–2001; negotiator Ek. Samar).

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(Informant Ev. Aktanko, born in 1931).

Letters in Verse from the Great War

Mirela Florian
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
mirelaflorian@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to study the records and testimonies created during the First World War in order to understand this important historical moment in the existence of Romanian rural communities. Many of the testimonies of Romanian soldiers capture the shift from oral culture and oral language to writing and written culture. Writing, which the soldiers had yet to fully internalize, was one of the few possibilities available to them on the war front to maintain alive the connection with their families and to leave a trace about the exceptional times they were living. These written accounts, which do not always observe the rules of correct writing, make apparent and available to us today a deep layer of oral culture that had until then been orally transmitted from generation to generation.

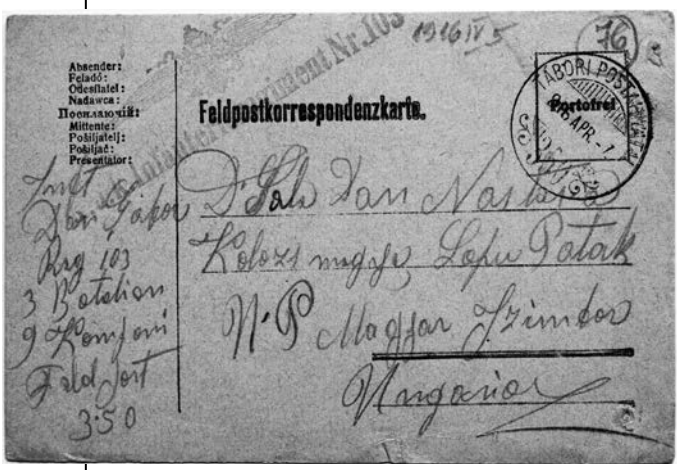
Romanian soldiers from Transylvania were best known for writing home messages in verse, which they composed on the spot, using memorized set structures and phrases from the shared folklore repertoire circulating at the time in the village world. Privates coming from the Kingdom of Romania also made verses in their letters or journal entries, but it was less common. They would sometimes insert in their notes orally transmitted moral stories or parables, as well as other forms and pieces of the peasant oral culture to which they belonged.

Some of these testimonies can present real challenges in terms of understanding the writing but also the semantics of some of the words. While familiarized with letters, writing, and reading, their authors had only a rudimentary knowledge of spelling and punctuation rules. To be able to discern the meanings of these writings today, one needs to first understand the complex circumstances that produced them.

KEYWORDS

Testimonies; verses; letters; soldiers; war; writing; orality; literacy; peasants; spelling; talent.

Over the past years, I had the chance to study numerous documents originating from the First World War—letters, diaries, postcards, photographs, diary entries from the front or captivity, reports of those who returned from captivity, or reports by military priests (see Florian 2017). Most of them are written in Romanian, but I also worked with notes by German, Austrian, French, or Hungarian solders. These testimonies piece back together fragments of the picture of an era, as well as of the life trajectories of some of their authors who, one way or another, participated in the Great War. And by that, I mean not only the background of the war and huge mobilization that was required by the confrontation between the two camps but also the traditions, education, religiousness, convictions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions of people caught in the conflict. The past is best revealed by its involuntary testimonies: writings and productions of material culture according to Françoise Choay (1998: 43). This valuable cultural heritage consists of objects that



Postcard preserved in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch.

not only do not falsify their own reality, but they also provide new original information on everything that were left out of the historians' accounts.

Publishing a large portion of this rich and diverse documentary material in the book-album *Scrisori de pe front* [Letters from the Front Line] was an endeavor to salvage the memory of the Great War, to approach the materiality of the war and its least known facet. The volume is not a historian's view of the war, offering instead a cultural heritage perspective at the intersection of several fields of research: anthropology, ethnology, microhistory, cultural history, and more. To capture a picture as complete as possible of the era I focused on the diversity of testimonies from participants in the war, which I selected not for objectivity but, quite on the contrary, for the subjectivity that they contain, for the identity and personality of each author.

However, for the purposes of this paper, the attention switches to the testimonies written in verse, to capturing the shift from orality to literacy, and to the role the Great War played in and its influence on the process of writing letters in verse, with a special focus on Romanian rural communities.

In particular, the analysis of the notes of Romanian soldiers during the First World War captures the very moment when the shift is made from a predominantly oral culture, typical of rural communities, to internalizing orality and to literacy. And this was made possible by the fact that the overwhelming majority of combatants, whether they came from the Kingdom of Romania, Transylvania, Banat, Maramureș, or Bucovina—the last four regions being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time—were uneducated ordinary peasants caught up in the maelstrom of history. Under the immense pressure of the four years of the war, which changed profoundly the course of the life of each soldier, the transition was made from the several-thousand-year-old practice of communicating orally to that of communicating in writing. Since the only way to keep in touch with their families was through letters, the peasant soldiers resorted to writing before they even had had a chance to learn it properly, spelling rules included. Nonetheless, as some of the authors of the letters, postcards, and diaries admitted, writing also became a means to express their surprise and horror, to leave a trace of the altogether exceptional events they were experiencing. Most likely the transition would have been achieved anyway but at a much later date, at the end of the literacy acquisition process ongoing at that time in rural communities—which was making very slow progress, particularly in the Kingdom of Romania—but wartime accelerated it.

Comparing, to the extent possible, the written testimonies of soldiers from the Kingdom of Romania with those of soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the differences can be said to be marked. The peasant soldiers of the Kingdom wrote mostly notes, front diaries, letters, and postcards made up of direct statements, in the usual reporting style, with only the occasional rhyme, as illustrated by Dumitru Dădârlat's correspondence with his wife Maria (in Florian 2017: 42–3). Those fighting in the imperial army wrote mostly in verse and, moreover, often used words borrowed

from other languages, regional and archaic words that have a certain charm but make it rather difficult to understand the meaning of their notes. As far as common traits go, both made little use of punctuation and sometimes had slightly different spellings for the same word, resulting in multiple forms of the same word.

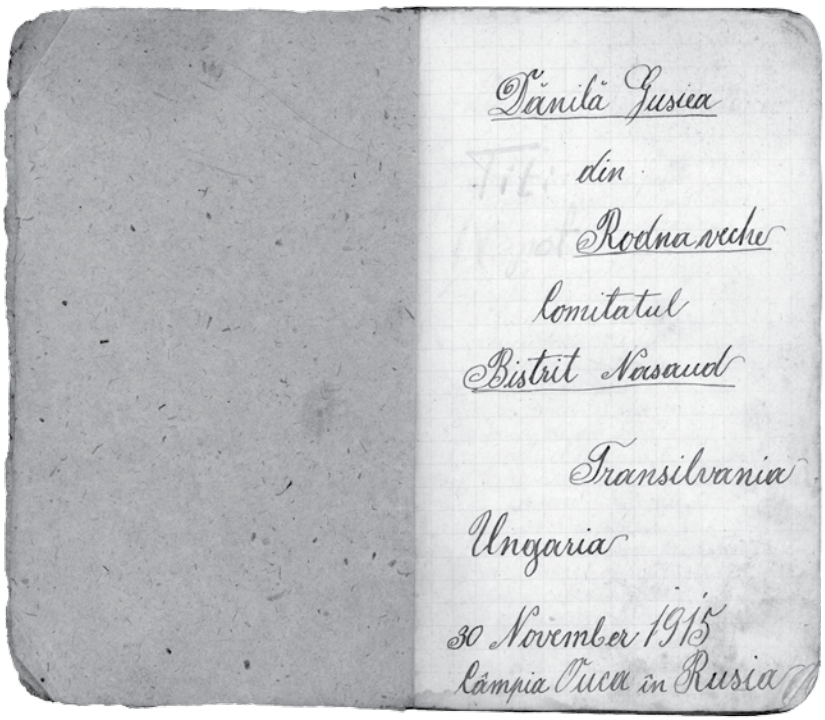
Among the testimonies of peasant soldiers caught up in the maelstrom of the Great War, which were rather diverse in content and writing style, the novelty, and also the most difficult to decipher and surprisingly numerous, were those written in verse. Some of these writings consisted of entire notebooks that soldiers usually kept in the breast pockets of their coats. These written records are based in oral culture, sometimes taking the form of phonetically transcribed notes, only vaguely complying with the writing rules that we know and use today. Some of the testimonies present a real challenge in terms of deciphering their message. Although they knew how to write, the authors did it rather phonetically—they knew the letters and wrote down the sounds as heard from autodictation, since they were not yet familiar with the alphabetic writing which we have internalized in the meantime. That explains why there are sometimes no spaces between words, or several spellings of the same word occur. Other times the texts include words from foreign languages or the military world, words specifically made up to name things or experiences from that war, only to be later abandoned or forgotten, or words with added syllables to improve recitation of verses. Such examples are: ţug meaning train; *roham*, attack; *kozaci*, Kosacks; *retipiş*, reciept; *asentare*, conscription; *cătănie*, military service; *răguţ*, young recruit, rookie; *rezbel*, war; *vălaş*, letter; *elşu*, first day in the month; *dohan*, tobacco; *papire*, paper; *urlab*, medical leave, pass; *supăr*, wound; *ştemper,* stamp; etc.

The hybridity visible here, where literacy and orality coexist (in the sense that literacy is based in orality), deserves our full attention because it is an *in situ* example of internalized orality and an entire world shaped by it, as well as of accommodation of spoken expressions in writing. It therefore makes apparent the strong link between the older oral practice and the newer skill and practice of writing among Romanian peasants, both on the front and in villages, throughout the First World War.

It is that type of mixed orality described by Paul Zumthor, where orality and literacy coexist but writing, as a more recently acquired skill and practice, influences oral expression only partially and superficially (2008: 189–90). Mixed orality is determined by the existence of literate culture regardless, however, of whether literacy dominates that culture or not.

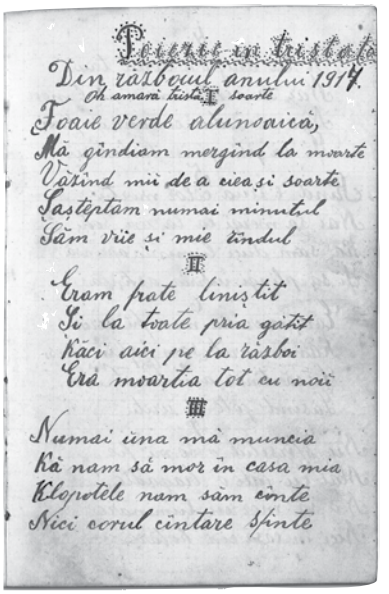
For the purpose of this study, several testimonies written in verse during the Great War were deciphered, transcribed, and analyzed. From the hundreds of pages included in the research, I have selected four sources and four excerpts, respectively, which I claim illustrate the transition from orality to literacy. Each excerpt has an author, and each author has his personal story determined and interwoven with the 1914 war that swept the Romanian-speaking village world as it was undergoing a slow process of acquiring literacy, thus accelerating the transition from oral culture to literate culture.

Dănilă Guşă's Notebooks currently kept in the Ethnologic Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum were discovered by researcher Petre Popovăţ during ethnographic research he conducted in 2000 in Rodna, a village in Bistriţa Năsăud County. Ilie Guşă had kept the four notebooks containing the notes of his grandfather, who had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army at the beginning of the First World War. Petre Popovăţ transcribed the notes, wrote down his own observations, with the intention to study them more thoroughly.



The first page of Dănăilă Guşă's Notebook,
Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

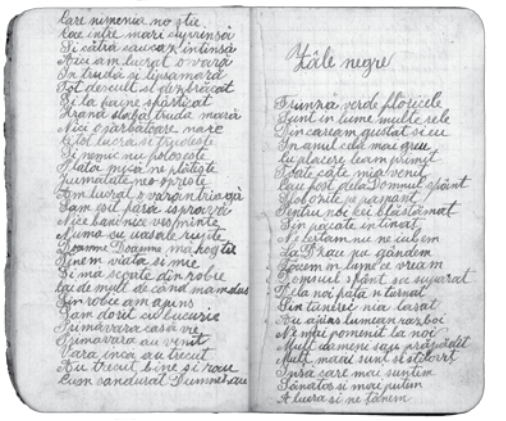
From the notebooks, we learn that Dănilă Guşă was born in 1874 in Rodna Veche, Bistriţa Năsăud County, Hungary (at that time). Starting with 1895, he did his military service in Bistriţa most likely, during which he must have sworn allegiance to Emperor Franz Joseph. Then, in August 1914, when the war broke out, he was conscripted in the Austro-Hungarian army, along with many other men. The first troops were headed to Serbia, and during the next wave, Dănilă Guşă was included in a "battalion" sent to Bucovina to fight against the Russian Imperial Army. Wounded to one arm, he was treated and sent back to the front, and not before long, had to fight once again the Russian troops, somewhere in the Carpathians, in the Galicia region. In January 1915, out of the two hundred sixty-five men in his company, after nights and days spent in the first line, in the snow and frost, the only eight remaining soldiers were captured by the Russians. A long period of forced exile and suffering began for Dănilă Guşă. He had to cross huge expanses of Russian territory to get to the region of Kalmykia where he did forced labor for various masters. Dănilă Guşă's notebooks include notes from captivity: scenes from the First World War, including how he was captured and made a prisoner, descriptions of his journeys and the places he saw, the religious calendar of 1915—most probably written from memory—a list of translated Russian words; one of the four notebooks is written entirely in verse. What distinguishes this author is that, under the strong impression that cultural differences, the otherness that he encountered everywhere in Kalmykia, made on him, he recorded descriptions of those settlements and communities, the physical appearance of the inhabitants, the buildings, occupations, social organization, children's education, men's and women's dress, language, religion, rituals, food, and so on.



Page from Ioța Boldurian soldier's Notebook, preserved in Boldurian's family collection

The volume *Întristaria de Ioța Boldurian* [The sadness by Ioța Boldurian] was published in 2018 in Timișoara, edition supervised by Vasile Bogdan, with interviews, foreword and afterword by Vasile Bogdan, annotation and final text by Florin Gâldău, and further annotation and graphic design by Grațian Gâldău. The work edited by Vasile Bogdan is organized around the rhyming notes from the front of Ioța Boldurian, a Romanian peasant born in 1883 in the village of Cerneteaz (Hungary at that time, Timiș County today) who was conscripted in the Austro-Hungarian army and sent to the front in Galicia,[1] in the summer of 1914, at the beginning of the war. The fighting was fierce in that region—which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—and Ioța Boldurian was captured by the Russians in March 1915. He came back home in spring 1918. While he was a prisoner in Romna, what is now probably Ukraine, he kept a diary in verse, in which he described his itinerary, giving the exact dates, the battles he took part in, the events that left a mark on him, the horrors of the front line, and the deaths of his brothers in suffering; he put into verse his feelings and emotions, especially his homesickness—it had already been around three years since he had hugged and said goodbye to his wife and children; he wrote down poems that were circulating at that time in the village world, with both known or anonymous authors, but most likely orally transmitted.

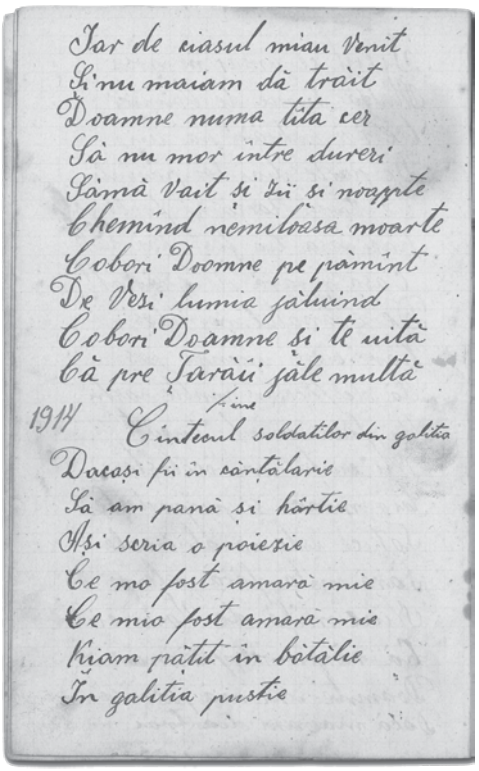
Scrieri țărănești, documente ologrefe în arhiva Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor „Constantin Brăiloiu" [Peasant notes, holographic records in the archive of Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore] (Jiga-Iliescu et al. 2005) is an anthology specifically compiled to serve for future research, offering a selection of notes by Romanian peasants covering a period from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War that capture the process of literacy acquisition and the transition from a predominantly oral culture to the internalization of writing. From this anthology, I will mostly refer to the excerpt *Versuri din cătănie și depe câmpul de luptă 1915. Neculae V Clonțea. Viștea Superioară Comitatul Făgărașului* [Verses from the military service and from the battlefield 1915. Neculae V Clonțea. Viștea Superioară Făgăraș County].



Page from Dănăilă Gușă's Notebook, Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

Among the notes and recordings collected by ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu—during fieldwork research for monographs supervised by sociologist Dimitrie Gusti—and kept in the archive of the eponymous Institute of Ethnography and Folklore are several notebooks containing verses by soldiers. Brăiloiu studied these notes written by peasants and published an extensive study *Poeziile soldatului Tomuț din războiul 1914-1918* [Poems by soldier Tomuț from the 1914–1918 war] (1944). "The peasants around there call this kind of book *verș* (sometimes *viers*), a term—very old apparently—that they understand as: (1) a more or less literate poem meant to be sung; and (2) a handwritten notebook including mostly such poems" (Brăiloiu 1944: 7). Brăiloiu pointed out the documentary value of such testimonies:

> … a multitude of everyday minutiae, events at home and elsewhere, which provide a living record of those times: conscription, announced by the *vornic* [crier] and gendarmes, ringing the church bells, and sounding the shepherd's horns; famine on the firing line, where soldiers had to eat horse meat; behind the frontline, the requisitioning of cattle, rationalization of bread, buried treasures, inflation (money "of steel, paper, and iron," not "shiny and desirable" like the Austrian money), the "pagans" who speculated and sold bread "dearly" to orphan girls and widows, the wives sleeping with the Russians (the Moskals had their ways with them), the villages where only girls, old women, and children were left, or the burnt villages—all of these constitute undoubtedly small pieces of history (Brăiloiu 1944: 20).


Iar de ciasul miau venit
Ș'nu maiam dă trăit
Doamne numa tita cer
Să nu mor între dureri
Șămă vait și zii și noapte
Chemînd nemîloasa moarte
Coboară Doamne pe pămînt
De vezi lumia jăluind
Coboară Doamne și te uită
Că pre Țarăii jăle multă
1914 Cîntecul soldaților din galiția
Dacoși fii în cântălarie
Să am pană și hârtie
Așă scria o poiezie
Ce mo fost amară mie
Ce mio fost amară mie
Șiam pătit în bătălie
În galiția pustie

Page from Ioța Boldurian soldier's Notebook, preserved in Boldurian's family collection.

Scrisorile lui Szfară Augustin către ai lui [The letters of Szfară Augustin to his family] are kept at the National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch, *Scrisori din Primul Război Mondial* (First World War letters) Collection. Cluj-Napoca was one of the centers of Austro-Hungarian military censorship; letters written by all nationalities fighting under the imperial flag that never reached their recipients were collected here. *Societatea Muzeului Ardelean* (Society of the Transylvanian Museum) collected these letters; they later entered the collections of the Library of the Academy, Cluj-Napoca branch; and, in 1974, finally reached the storage of the State Archives in Cluj-Napoca. Among them were the letters of Szfară Augustin to his family—his mother, brother, sister, aunt, and nephews and nieces. From November 1914 to March 1916, for almost one and a half years, Augustin sent over thirty-three letters, some of which written in verse, from the places that he visited with his regiment—from Cluj, Pardubice, Prague, Budweis, etc. He wrote a lot to his family, as much as two letters a day; most of the times

he described his emotional state and his health, which went from bad to worse after he was wounded, asking his family to send him a package or money, but most of all to answer his letters, as he was convinced that he would feel better every time he received a letter from home.

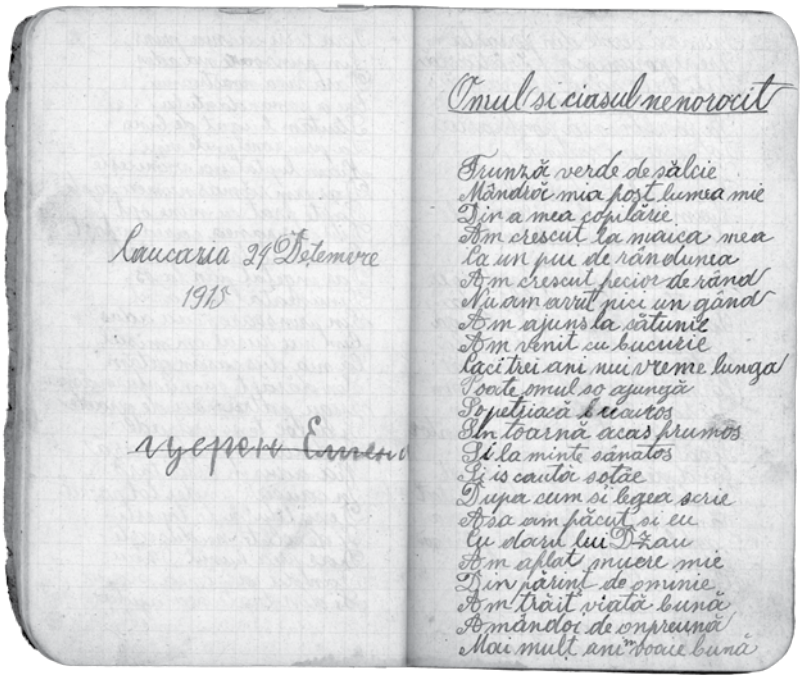
Letter from Szfară Augustin to his family, preserved in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch.

These four sources, each consisting of dozens of pages of notes in verse, are to a great extent representative for the communities of Romanian peasants in Transylvania, Banat, Maramureş, and Bucovina during the Great War. They are illustrative of a letter-writing style rather widespread at the time. They show us a new face of ourselves, as in a mirror, but the time elapsed since they were written creates an effect of distancing, inaccessibility. At a first reading, these texts can be difficult to decipher. To understand them, to make them once more accessible, one must explain the "ingredients" and the conditions of their making: the existence of a shared, preponderantly oral fund of peasant culture; the superficial internalizing of writing typical of the beginning of literacy acquisition in rural communities; the particularly extraordinary pressure and the impact of living through the war; and last but not least, each author's personal talent in using the shared repertoire of oral culture and his improvising skills.

Verse Writing and the Shared Fund of Peasant Culture

A great proportion of the notes that remain from Romanian soldiers in Transylvania, Banat, Maramureș, and Bucovina who took part in the First World War are written in verse, in contrast with the records remaining from the soldiers in the Kingdom of Romania. They too wrote letters in verse but to a much smaller extent. Writing in verse naturally followed the collective, ritual practice of communication, i.e., oral communication. Stored in the collective memory was a shared fund of semi-standardized formulations and structures, rhyming storytelling techniques tailored to different recurring events and occasions, even fragments of poems or whole works by known or anonymous authors that were circulating at the time. This relatively vast folklore repertoire served particularly those who had the necessary skills to mix and improvise in order to create their own versified formulations. And every time, these creations had a recipient, or at least that was what the author had intended.

For illustration, I provide an excerpt from Dănilă Guşă's notebook with verses, as transcribed by Petre Popovăţ, held in the Romanian Peasant Museum Archives:



Page from Dănăilă Guşă's Notebook, Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

Caucasus, December 24, 1915
Man and the Cursed Hour

Green willow leaf/ How I loved the world/ Since I was little/ I was my mother's child/ Like a chick to a swallow/ I was raised a simple lad/ Not a care in the world/ And when I first did my service/ I went willingly/ For three years is not long/ You

Caucaz, 24 Decembrie, 1915
Omul şi ciasul nenorocit

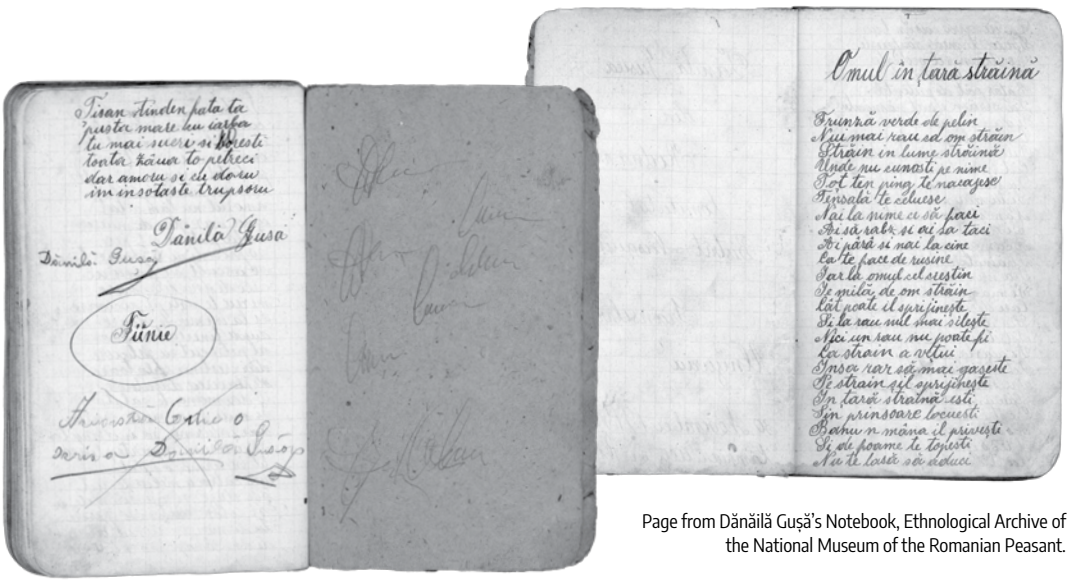
Frunză verde de sălcie/ Mândră mi-a fost lumea mie/ Din a mea copilărie/ Am crescut la maica mea/ Ca un pui de rândunea/ Am crescut fecior de rând/ Nu am avut nici un gând/ Am ajuns la cătunie – / Am venit cu bucurie/ Căci trei ani nu-i vreme lungă/

can see the end of it/ And even find some joy in it/ And then you go home merrily/ With a good mind/ Look for a wife/ As is written in the Law / And so I did/ With God's help/ I found me a wife/ From decent folk/ We had a good life/ Together we lived/ Quite a few happy years/ Green leaf in the window/ Hard is the emperor's order/ And it has to be fulfilled/ And the emperor's harsh order said/ That all who'd done their service/ Had to go fight in the war/ So I set off from my dear village/ ... Since I left my home/ Not one good man have I met/ Many woes came upon me/ Only sorrow and regret/ The longer my soldiering/ The more miserable and sad/ Many hardships have I had/ I looked round/ And saw the whole world/ Down to the west/ From where I'd come/ And then I felt so lonely/ So much sorrow and homesickness/ For my dearest wife/ And my dearest children/ ... Now the Russians took me/ And brought me to the sea/ Since the Russians got me/ My heart gone and dried up/ For being captive in Russia/ Crushes your very soul/ It makes you come undone/ And leaves you bone dry/ ... Green apple leaf/ What's a man's life worth/ Now it's blooming/ And next is no more, all withered/ For in this here life/ Many woes I've come to know/ But there's no greater ill/ Than the horror of the war/ This is the worst of all/ As given by God/ I set off to battle/ With the best of brothers/ And we got to the Carpathians/ In the forest made of firs/ Where death lurches all around/ Many good lives/ I had to watch go out/ For there was nothing I could do/ Just sit by myself and watch/ Had I made one move/ The bullet would've quickly mown me/ ... One day 'bout evening/ The fire started again/ We worked hard all night/ Spent all our bullets/ All were killed/ Except for eight of us/ Not much to look at/ And when the morning came/ We saw the Russians before us/ They surrounded and grabbed us/ To make us prisoners/ Took away our arms at once/ And showed us a house/ So I headed there/ Like the

Poate omul s-o ajungă / S-o petriacă bucuros / Şi-ntoarnă acas' frumos / Şi la minte sănătos/ Şi îş' caută soţâe/ După cum şi legea scrie/ Aşa am făcut şi eu/ Cu daru' lui D-zău/ Am aflat muere mie/ Din părinţ' de ominie/ Am trăit viaţă bună/ Amândoi de-ompreună/ Mai mulţ' ani [în] voaie bună/ Frunză verde din feriastă/ Grea-i porunca-mpărătiască/ Iute trebe să să 'plinească/ Au venit poruncă aspră/ La război ca să porniască/ Toţ' care au cătunit/ Şi eu încă am pornit/ Din satul meu cel iubit/ [...]/.De când de-acas-am plecat/ De om bun eu n-am mai dat/ Multe rele m-a' mâncat/ Şi tot jele şi bănat/ Cu cât drumul mi-am lungit/ Tot mai jelnic şi urât/ Şi mult greu am împlinit/ Ocii mi-am făcut roată/ M-am uitat în lumea toată/ Şi în jos, cătă 'sfinţât/ Din cătră eu am venit/ M-au ajuns mare urât/ M-au ajuns un dor şi jele/ După scumpa mea muere/ După pruncii mei cei dragi/ [...]/ Ieu acuma-s prins la rus/ Lângă mare am ajuns/ De când rusul m-a luat/ Sufletul mi s-a uscat/ Că robia din Rusia/ Îţi zdrobeşte inima/ Te face din om neom/ Şi te uscă ca pe-un pom/ [...]/ Frunză verde-a mărului/ Ce-i viaţa omului/ Astăz' este şi-nfloreşte/ Mâne nu-i să veştezeşte/ Cât în lume am trăit/ Multe reale-am pătimit/ Însă, rău mai mare nu-i/ Ca groaza războiului/ Iel e cel mai mare rău/ Lăsat de la Dumnezău/ Am pornit la bătălie/ Cu uameni de ominie/ Ş-am ajuns între Carpaţi/ În pădurea cea de brazi/ Pe tot locul te aştiaptă/ Moartea, ca să te răpiască/ Multe vieţ' frumuşele/ S-au stâns privind sângur la ele/ N-am putut să le ajut/ Sângur numa' să mă uit/ De mişcam minten îndată/ Glonţul minten mă săgeată/ [...]/ Într-o zî, cam de cu sară/ S-a început focu' iară/ Noaptea-ntriagă ne-am trudit/ Gloanţele le-am isprăvit/ Toţ' dintre noi au murit/ Numa' opt am fost rămas/ Şi noi trudiţ' de năcaz/ Când au fost de demineaţă/ Am văzut pe rus în faţă/ Ne-ncunjoară, ne apucă/ Prisoneri ca să ne ducă/ Ni-a luat armele-ndată/ Şi o casă ne arată/ Pe urmă, am şi pornit/ Ca omul cel

miserable man I was/ I saw things/ To make the devil scared/ The Russians jumped in front of us/ They danced and wanted to sing to us/ Then we went inside the house/ They put us at the table/ Gave us bread, gave us tea/ To warm us 'cause we were frozen/ And gathered more than a hundred of us/ And led us away/ We followed the downhill road/ Tears rolling down our cheeks/ We went slowly, silent/ Just like dumb men/ Our heads bowed/ Our eyes drowning in tears/ With our hands we held our clothes/ For there was a terrible wind/ And when we passed through towns/ People on seeing us/ Asked where we were headed/ To Siberia, we said/ When they heard so/ God, how they pitied us/ They gave us money and food/ And clothes to those unclothed/ The ladies, how they cried/ And cursed the Russians/ Bad and cruel people/ You took us by force/ Our soldiers you catch/ You send them to Siberia/ To work them to death/ And starve them to death/ Money, watches, all we had/ They snatched them right away/ We couldn't fight them/ And had no one to tell it to/ They marched us out of the country/ And we entered bitter Russia/ We finally reached the train/ Which was to take us farther/ We had neither money, nor food/ The cold was so bitter/ One month we were in the train/ Eaten alive by lice/ When the train stopped in the station/ They took down dozens of dead men/ And hid them all at once/ So no one can know/ How terrible they made our journey/ And make it heard back home/ Finally the train arrived/ In a nice, famous town/ Samara they call it/ We got to it in the evening/ Gnawed by bitter hunger/ Then a wire came/ To go back to Kazan/ The Hungarians went on/ We Romanians went back/ They waited for us in Kazan/ With little food/ And then took us/ Frozen to the bone/ Two weeks' marching/ We all had frozen hands/ And faces, and noses/ But hunger was hardest to fight/ Many lads died on the way/ And then we reached Ialaboga [Yelabuga]/ Dănilă Guşă.[2]

năcăjit/ Am văzut lucruri de care/ Şi dracul încă să spare/ Ne săreau ruşî-nainte/ Ne juca şi vrea să cânte/ Am intrat pe urmă-n casă/ Şi ne-a băgat după masă/ Ni-a dat pită, ni-a dat ciai/ Să ne-ncălzâm, că-ngeţai/ Şi au strâns mai mult de-o sută/ Şi ne-a luat să ne ducă/ Am luat pe drum la vale/ Lacrămile curgea vale/ Ni-am luat încet, tăcuţ/ Tocmai ca şi neşte muţ'/ Cu capu-n pământ plecat/ Ochii-n lacrămi înecaţ'/ Mânile ţinem veşmântul/ Căci grozav mai sufla vântul/ Prin oraşă când treceam/ Oamenii, cât ne vedeau/ Ne-ntreba unde mergém/ La Siberia – răspundeam/ Îndată cât ce-auzeau/ Doamne, amar să mai căeau/ Ne da bani şi de mâncare/ Şi veşminte, care n-are/ Doamnele, cum mai plângeau/ Şi pe ruş' îi ocăreau/ Uameni răi şi fără milă/ V-aţ' suit pe noi cu sâla/ Soldaţii, care-i prindeţ'/ În Siberia-i trimeteţ'/ Ca să piară de trudiţ'/ Şi de foame hamnisâţ'/ Bani, ciasuri şi ce-am avut/ Ni-a luat în un minut/ Nu ne-am putut 'potrivi/ Şi la cine a pârî/ Şi ni-a scos din ţar-afară/ Am intrat în Rusia amară/ Am ajuns cu greu la tren/ Mai departe să mergém/ N-am avut bani, nici mâncare/ Frigul era foarte mare/ O lună pe tren am stat/ Şi păducii ne-a mâncat/ Trenu-n gară cât stătea/ Zăci de morţ' îi coborea/ Şi-i ascundea iuti îndată/ Ca nime' să nu priceapă/ Cu ce groază ei ne poartă/ S-audă în ţara noastă/Trenu-n urmă au sosât/ În oraş mândru viestit/ Samara este numit/ Am ajuns în el de sară/ Mâncaţ' de foame amară/ Au venit un telegram/ Să-nturnăm cătă Cazan/ Ungurii s-au depărtat/ Noi, rumânii-am înturnat/ În Cazan ni-au aşteptat/ Cu puţină demâncare/ Şi pe urmă ni-a luat/ Aproape toţ-îngheţaţ'/ Pre jos doauă săptămâni/ Toţ' am îngeţat la mâni/ Şi la obraz şi la nas/ Da' de foame, ce să faci/ Mulţ' feciori s-au prăpădit/ Şi pe drum au tot murit/ Până în Ialaboga am sosât/ Dănilă Guşă.



Page from Dănăilă Gușă's Notebook, Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

The last page of Dănăilă Gușă's Notebook, Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

The State of Education and Level of Literacy

The available data tell us that the four soldiers were born at the end of the nineteenth century. Dănilă Gușă was born in 1874, in Bistrița, and Ioța Boldurian was born in 1883, in Timiș, and he graduated seven grades at a Hungarian-language public school. The younger ones were Neculae Clonțea from Făgăraș, who was conscripted later, and Szfară Augustin from Sălaj. Each of them was only partially familiarized with writing and spelling and punctuation rules of the Romanian language—it is known that Romanian-language education, whether public or religious, in turn of the twentieth century Transylvania was in many regards lacking (Brusanowsky 2010: 294–310).

Under the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867–1918), the educational policy in Transylvania was controlled by the government in Budapest. The School Law in force at the time provided compulsory primary education for children from six to twelve, while breaching the rights to educational and cultural autonomy of non-Hungarian ethnic groups. It was particularly from 1880 to 1910, the period when the four soldier authors could have at least in theory attended primary school, that Romanian-language education in Transylvania came under great pressure. The Hungarian government had just launched and started implementing a policy to assimilate the other nationalities, for the purpose of creating a unified Hungarian nation-state. The first step under the nationalist policy, also known as Hungarization, was adopting the School Law of 1879 that introduced Hungarian as a compulsory subject of study in primary schools, including the schools of other ethnic groups, and stipulated the decrease in the number of hours taught in the mother tongue. This law also aimed to develop secular education to the detriment of religious education, which accounted for 90 percent of primary schools existing at that time. One of the effects of the law was a decrease in the number of Romanian schools from 1880 to 1900.

Romanian schools, most of them administered by parishes, so religious schools, were also facing several other challenges at that time. They were experiencing various degrees of shortages and poverty; for instance, there were not enough buildings for schools, the existing ones were too crowded or inadequate, the teachers were poorly paid and sometimes undertrained, and the teaching material (textbooks, blackboards, maps, globes, etc.) was lacking.

This policy to assimilate the other ethnic groups and forcefully impose the Hungarian language also applied to first and last names, which were Hungarized. This explains why letters and postcards written in Romanian, in the holdings of the National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch, have senders and recipients with Hungarian names.

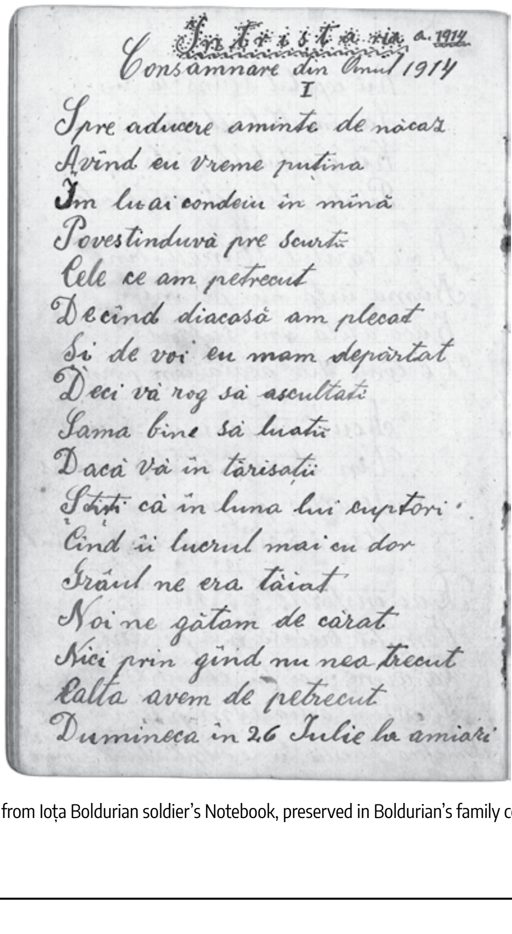
The envelope of the letter sent by Szfară Augustin to his family, preserved in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch.

From Neculae V. Clonţea's notebook, we learn that, on the front, illiterate soldiers had to ask literate ones to write or read letters for them:

> It's bad enough/ When you don't read and write/ For if you want to write a letter/ You must depend on others/ But how hard it is/ To ask all the time/ When you want to write a letter/ To send it in the post/ Let your family know/ How you've been/ But it never gets easy/ To ask a stranger/ As it often happens/ That your asking has no answer/ Especially on the train/ I saw many people asking/ This or another man/
>
> Apoi mai rău e de cine/ Nu ştie ceti şi scrie/ Că când vrea să scrie carte/ De alţi trebue se se roge/ Dar cât îţi vine de greu/ A te ruga tot mereu/ Când vreai ca se scrii o carte/ Pe poştă a o trimete/ Ca se ştie şi ai tei/ Tu în ce stare mai stai/ Dară tot cu greu îţi vineri/ Se te rogi de nu ştiu cine/ Se'ntâmplă de multe ori/ Zadarnice-atale rugări/ Eu mai cu seamă pe trin/ Am văzut pe mulţi rugând/ Pe unul şi pe altul/ Ca se'i

To write them a few lines/ To write down their thoughts/ In three, four or five lines/ But only few are willing to do it/ So I tell you honestly/ I thank God/ And my good parents/ That they took care of me/ And put me in school/ Where I learnt to read and write/ I had no idea before/ How much this was worth/ To write and read/ And to know arithmetic/ If you don't know how to read/ And you receive a letter/ You have to give it to someone else/ To tell you what it says/ And so it often happens/ That he who reads it to you/ Tells you this or that/ Not what the letter says/ And this causes you much trouble/ And does you much wrong/ So you come to appreciate/ Those who write and read/ So my advice for you, brothers/ Is to command your children/ To work hard in school/ To not miss one day/ To learn to read and write/ So they can have a happy life/ June 27, 1915 (Jiga-Iliescu et al. 2005: 67–9).

scrie puținel/ Se'i scrie ale lui gânduri/ În trei patru sau cinci rânduri/ Dară puțini se găsesc/ De cari voea 'i-o'mplinesc/ Acum vă spun drept că eu/ Mulțămesc lui Dumnezeu/ Și la ai mei buni părinți/ Că de mine a grijit/ La școală de am umblat/ Ceti scrie-am învățat/ Până acum n'am știut/ Cât prețuiește de mult/ A scrie și a ceti/ Și bine a socoti/ Cine nu știe ceti/ O carte de va primi/ Trebue la alt s'o dea/ Să vadă ce'i scris în ea/ De multe ori nimerește/ Că acel ce 'i o cetește/ Îi spune una și alta/ Nu'i spune ce zice cartea/ Și așa îl năcăjește/ Mult reu îi pricinuiește/ Atunci ști a prețui/ Cei a scrie și-a ceti/ Pentru-aceea fraților/ Porunciți copiilor/ La școlă a se sili/ O zi ei a nu lipsi/ Se'nvețe-a ceti și scrie/ Ca se aivă bucurie/ 27 Iunie 1915" (Jiga-Iliescu et al. 2005: 67-9).


Intristaria a. 1914
Consamnare din Anul 1914
I
Spre aducere aminte de năcaz
Avînd eu vreme putina
Im luai condeiu in mînă
Povestinduvă pre scurt
Cele ce am petrecut
Decînd diacosă am plecat
Si de voi eu mam depărtat
Deci vă rog să ascultati
Sama bine să luati
Dacă vă in tărisati
Stiti că in luna lui cuptori
Cînd ii lucrul mai cu dor
Grâul ne era tăiat
Noi ne gătam de cărat
Nici prin gînd nu nea trecut
Calta avem de petrecut
Duminica in 26 Iulie la amiazi

Page from Ioța Boldurian soldier's Notebook, preserved in Boldurian's family collection.

The War Lived as an Extreme Situation

The Great War certainly had a deep, overwhelming impact on every private, sergeant, or officer, and on the world as a whole. "If it weren't for the First World War, many later developments would have not happened. The world would be a different place today" (Boia 2014: 28). The conscripts in particular, who made up the bulk of the armies, were peasants taken out of their settled lives, many of them, as they wrote in their verses, had completed their military service (Ro. *cătănie*) but only had a vague idea of what the war could entail. They might have known something about it from the stories of their forefathers, or from folklore. Each of them tried to survive, had its unique personal experience of those dramatic years of the war. For many of them, writing was an important source of support during both dark times and brighter days.

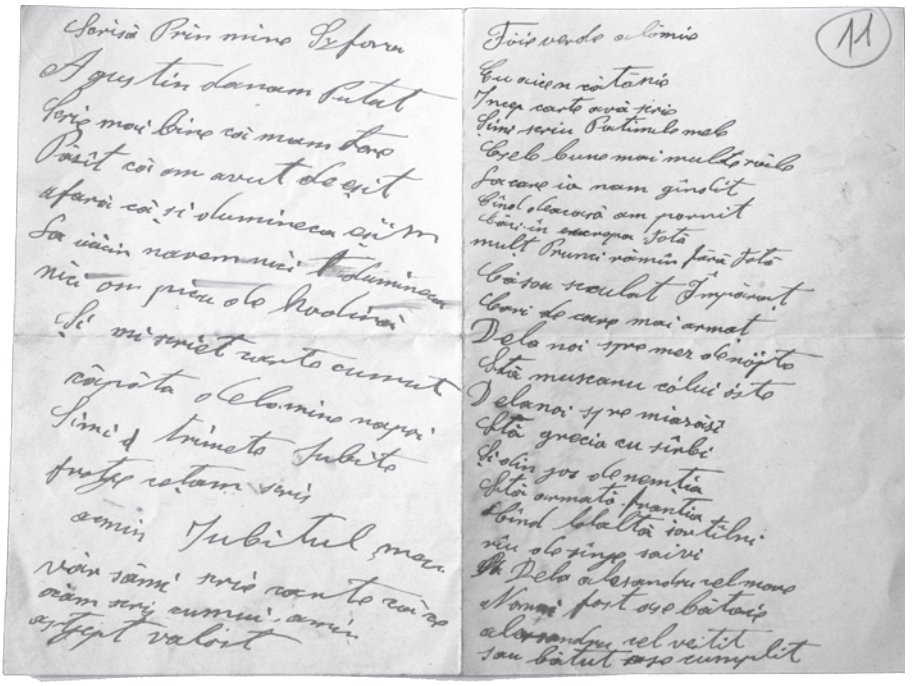
In an important work on the effects of the First World War on the rural world, Eugenia Bîrlea found that:

> The form of the First World War letters shows that, for the majority of the rural population, this was not a comfortable means of communication. The clumsiness is visible not only in the inability to express their feelings in a nuanced way. The traditional village world was dominated by song. Overwhelming emotions, whether of joy or of pain, all human feelings were *codified*. Performing folklore genres appropriate for each emotional state had a *cathartic* purpose. In singing *cântec de jale* [song of sorrow], they achieved a state of peace and quiet waiting. Folk creation channels personal experience into pre-existing patterns that allow for personal expression, as each performance becomes a new version. The constraining role of the pattern unifies one's personal emotional experience with everybody else's. When offered the opportunity to communicate their feelings in writing, they faced the challenge resorting to the verses of folk songs, which helped them express their feelings, the ineffable nuances of human emotions (2004: 253).

Studying the notebooks of Romanian-speaking Transylvanian combatants, one notices that they start off on a more optimistic note but, as one follows the manuscript to the end, the authors' state of mind turns increasingly darker, more pessimistic, and redemption is often to be found in religious faith, in the state of prayer. Each of the four authors introduces himself briefly at the start of the notebook, on the first page, recounting the moment the drums sounded the conscription in their village and they left for the front, the sad goodbye to their families. Other common theme to the verses in the soldiers' notebooks are: the fierceness of battles they engage in; nostalgia for their peaceful lives at home; longing for their wives, children, mothers, and other family members; almost constant hunger; lack of sleep; loud sound of bombs, shells, and machine guns; feeling isolated; death of some of their brothers in arms; fear, nearness and inevitability of death; faith in God and prayers.

Reading Dumitru Caracostea's work (2015), which draws on a large number of direct accounts by participants, officers and soldiers, in the First World War, especially originally from the Kingdom of Romania, but members of the imperial army too, the prevalence of the themes listed above is confirmed. The more prominent psychological aspects of participating in the war that Caracostea analyses overlap with the main themes of the soldiers' poems: the soul and its states; fear and what amplifies it into panic; strong visual and especially audio sensations; self-preservation instinct or hunger to be alive; ownership and family instincts; fame acquired by some of the battles in the war; isolation; and, finally, trust in God.

I have selected a letter written in verse by Szfară Augustin (held in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch) to illustrate the state of misery caused by participation in the war:



Letter in verses from Szfară Augustin to his family, preserved in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch.

October 29, 1914

Brass green leaf/ From the army/ I start to write you a letter/ I write about my woes/ More bad than good/ Things I couldn't imagine/ When I left home/ For across Europe/ Many children are left fatherless/ Because emperors have gone to war/ One better armed than the other/ North of home/ There's the Moskal army/ South of home/ There's Greece and the Serbs/ And south of Germany/ There's France and its army/ And when they meet/ A river of blood'll flow/ Since Alexander the Great/ There's been no such fighting/ The famous Alexander/ Who fought so fiercely/ Back in the Old Testament times/ And it had no match until/ This cruel and fierce war/ Which has taken hold of Europe/ We're not very afraid/ Because Germany is a great power/ Along with Austria-Hungary/ They'll fight together/ We'll fight with our

29 Octombrie 1914

Fòie verde alămie/ Eu aice n cătănie/ Încep carte avă scrie/ Îmi scriu Patimile mele/ Cele bune mai multe râle/ La care io nam gândit/ Cînd deacasă am pornit/ Căci în europa totă/ mulț Prunci rămîn fără tată/ Că sau sculat Împâraț/ Cari de care mai armaț/ De la noi spre mez de nopte/ Sta muscanu călui oste/ De la noi spre miazăzî/ Stă grecia cu sîrbi/ Și din jos de nemția/ Stă armată franția/ Cînd lolaltă sontîlni/ rîu de sînge sa ivi/ De la Alesandru cel mare/ No mai fost așe bătaie/ Alexandru cel vestit/ Sau bătut așe cumplit/ Aceio fost în lege vecie / Și niau găsit așe Părecie/ Rezbel crîncen fioros/ Pe europa sau întors/ Nu ne temem așe tare/ Că nemțiai Putere mare/ Cu austra ungaria/ Tot odată sor lupta/ Niom lupta cu pept cu brață/ Pe rusia cea măriață/ Dar muscari din mez de nòpte

chests, our arms/ Against the great Russia/ But the Moskals keep on coming/ From the north with a big army/ And there'll be a mighty battle/ One fiercer than the other/ And the lads in the first line/ Will all go down/ One thousand, two thousands/ No matter how new their rifles/ One thousand, three thousands/ Always from the first line/ And the reserve at the back/ Keeps on fighting as they fall/ And so many lads will die by fire/ Like the buffaloes in the mud puddle/ Like the wood in the forest/ Cut down by the axe/ Oh, the heaven is crying still/ To see so much blood/ The moon and the sun/ The morning star and other stars/ They all cry/ The poor people too/ Because they took away their children/ To be captured by the enemies/ By the Serbians and the Moskals/ Their poor bodies/ Run over by canons/ Miserable life/ Cut up with the sword/ For when the sword's thin/ I see it and I feel ill/ For when the sword's rusty/ I feel my heart full of loathin'/ And the pagan sword/ Chops off Romanian heads/ This is my letter, mother/ Which I've written from my homesick heart/ He who wants to believe/ Should read and see for himself/ He who doesn't want to believe/ Lord, take him to see/ To see like I saw/ How I live in foreign countries.

/ vin Potop Potop cu òste/ Şor da luptă crîncenòsă/ Cari de cari mai fiòròsă/ Iarî în fruntia linii/ Vor pica toţ feciori/ Pică omie pică două/ Tot degep puşca ce nouă/ Picăo mie pică tri/ Tot din frunte leniei/ Ior răzărva dela spate/ întăreşte mai departe/ Şor sta morţ fecior n foc/ Ca şi bivoli n băltoc/ Cum stau lemnile n Pădure/ Ces tăiete de săcure/ Oh şi ceriul încă Plânge/ unde vede atăta sînge/ Plânge luna sòrele/ Luciaferi stelele/ Iar Poporul econom/ Că nes duşi copii lor/ Des de pradă la dujmani/ Şi la sîrbi şi la muscari/ Năcăjite trupurile/ Călcate cu tunurile/ Amărîtă viiaţă/ Tăietă cu sabia/ Că sabiai subţirică/ Undeo văd inimami pică/ Şi sabiai ruginosă/ La inima mei greţòsă/ Şi sabiai de păgîn/ Taie capuri de rumîn/ Astai maică cărtice/ Scrisă cu dor din inima me/ Cui place vre să criadă/ Să cetiască şi să vadă/ Dar cine nu vre să criadă/ Dul Domne pre el să vadă/ Să vadă şi el ca mine/ Cum trăiesc în ţări străine.

To conclude here, it is worth noting that the majority of those who came back from the front bearing these notebooks full of verse, having survived the war, did not continue to write in their home villages. In the tranches, on the battle fields, during marches, in war hospitals or as prisoners, their journaling had been a means to communicate with their close ones and ultimately survive.

Improvisation and Personal Talent

Personal talent in using oral structures, creating new combinations and improvising is what distinguishes the authors. Each had his unique way of using the fund of oral expressions and his innate gift, the result being the originality of his verses.

Ioţa Boldurian came back to his home in Banat region with a notebook full of verses, which his family kept, and in which he described his itinerary and experience of the war. Standing out among the verses is an excerpt that covers several pages of his notebook, which he called *Întristaria* [The sadness].

Notes from 1914

Not to forget my troubles/ Since I had a little time/ I picked up the pen/ To tell you the brief story/ Of the things I went through/ Since I left home/ And went away from you/ So please listen to me/ Pay attention/ If it interests you/ It was in July/ When work is at its height/ We'd cut down the wheat/ Just about finished carrying it/ No idea did we have/ That we had something else to do/ Sunday July 26 at noon/ … Then tomorrow around evening/ We left for the station again/ After we all got on board/ Danger fell upon us/ Two trains crashed/ A few lads got hurt/ Then we started around evening/ Traveled until dawn/ When we arrived in Lemberg/ We slept in the train station/ When the sun came up/ We set off on foot/ Through the streets of the capital/ The capital of Galicia/ The sun was high in the sky/ It poured down heat/ We had such a hard time walking/ The road was full of dust/ From automobiles and carts/ The roads were also full/ Of infantry/ Honvéd[3] soldiers/ Gunners and Hussars/ Dragoons and Ulahns/ Bosniaks and Landsturmers[4]/ Jagers[5] and so many others/ With bright swords/ Glinting in the glorious sun/ … Monday August 31, 1914 after Mary's Assumption/ In the fire at Kulikow/ I will start here/ Telling you about the fighting/ As we reached it in the morning/ Our faces went dark/ For the road was full/ Of carts with wounded men/ Some of them badly maimed/ Others with wounds on arms/ Legs and so on/ From the enemy fire/ For on Sunday a battle had been fought/ For three hours in the evening/ Many soldiers were killed in it/ For the wretched Russians/ Had made holes in the ground/ And strong redoubts/ And no one could get them out/ … Lemon green leaf/ October 1/ Twas before daybreak/ When the Russians started/ Sending fire upon us/ At first light/ They had brought terrible death/ Blood flowing in the ground/ All red blood/ From wholesome lads/ When they fired their rifles/ The bullets came like flies/ And

Consămnare din Anul 1914

Spre aducere aminte de năcaz/ Avînd eu vreme puțina/ Îm luai condeiu în mână/ Povestinduva pre scurtŭ/ Cele ce am petrecut/ De cînd diacasă am plecat/ Și de voi eu mam depărtat/ Deci vă rog să ascultați/ Sama bine să luații/ Dacă vă în tărisați/ Știți că în luna lui cuptori/ Cînd îi lucrul mai cu dor/ Grîul ne era tăiat/ Noi ne gătam de cărat/ Nici prin gînd nu nea trecut / Calta avem de petrecuta trecut/ Dumineca în 26 Iulie la amiazi/ [...]/ Apoi mîne zii spre siară/ Plecarăm spre stațiune iară/ După ce niam în cărcat/ O primejde soîn tîmplat/ DoauaTrenuri sor ciocnit/ Chtiva ficiori sor rănit/ Apoi plecarăm spre sară/ Pînă în spre ziuă iară/ La Lemberg noi am sosit/ În ștație am dormit/ Iar cînd soarele au răsărit/ Noi pre picioare am pornit/ Prin stradă prin căpitala/ A Galiției Căpitală/ Soarele să rădica/ Multă căldură vărsa/ Avurăm greu a umbla/ Drumul numai prav iera/ De cocii motomobile/ Drumurile ierau pline/ Apoi și de pedestrime/ Honvezime Infanterie/ De tunari și de husari/ De dragonări și olanii/ Bosneci și Landă șitii/ Iegări și mulți alți chîtii/ Cu armele lucitoare/ Strălucind la mîndrul soare/ [...]/ Luni în 31 August 1914 după Sîntămăria mare întîi în foc / La Culicov/ Acuma voiesc să în cepp/ Din luptă să povestesc/ Ajungînd aici Diminiața/ Niso întunecat fața/ Căci drumul iera plinuțu/ De cocii de cei răniți/ Unii erau răi chilaviți/ Alții la mînii ierau răniți/ Prin picioare șin alt loc/ De a dușmanului foc/ Căci Duminecă so datŭ/ O luptă spre în sărat 3 oare/ În care mulți or picatŭ/ Căci rusul cel blăstămat/ În pămînt sau îngropat/ Făcînduși rădute bune/ Casă nul mai scoată nime/ [...]/ Foaie verde de lămîie/ Ochtomvre ziua întîie/ Nici de zii nu so crepat/ Pîn rusul so apucat / Să trimiată foc spre noi/ De la revărsat de zori/ Grozavă moarte făcusă/ Mult sînge pe jos că cursă/ Numai sînge de cel roșu/ Din Feciorii de cei frumosu/ Cînd pușca cu puștele/ Viniau plumbi ca muștele/ Iar cînd da cu tunurile/ Să spargă festungurile/ Picau granate înșirate/ Ca cu

when they fired their cannons/ To shatter the festungs [strongholds]/ The grenades fell one after another/ Like seeds scattered by hand/ The lads fell down/ And never got up/ Their graves were dug/ By the cursed grenades/ ... God please don't leave me/ If I still have days to live/ And if my time's come/ And my days are up/ God all I ask/ Is not to die in pain/ To wail night and day/ Calling for ruthless death/ God please come down to earth/ To see the people cry/ God please come down and look/ How the country is ridden with suffering/ fine [the end] (Boldurian 2018: 48–97)

mîna răsfirate/ Ficiori picau cămară/ Şi nici nu să mai sculară/ Lor mormîntul lio săpat/ Blăstămatul se granat/ [...]/ Doamne nu mă părăsi/ Dacă mai am dia trăi/ Iar de ciasul miau venit/ Şi nu mai am de trăit/ Doamne numa tîta cer/ Să nu mor între dureri/ Să ma vait şi zii şi noappte/ Chemînd nemiloasa moarte/ Cobori Doamne pe pămînt/ De vezi lumia jăluind/ Cobori Doamne şi te uită/ Că pre Ţarăîi jăle multă/ fine" (Boldurian, 2018: 48-97).

For those who used this type of versification in their front notebooks, loss of expressivity and feeling due to the shift from orality to writing was certainly strongly felt. Indeed, the same word can take different intonations and inflexions in speaking, depending on the moment, the circumstances. Its uttering is always accompanied by an emotion, it is never the same, because there is something living at work there—the emotion in the moment of a conversation or account is decisive. Now, when written, a word is always same, it fails to capture the nuances and emphasizes of speech. Most likely the subjects of this study, the peasant soldiers of the First World War, also felt that, once set to paper, the words seemed to lose some of their power, and the sequences of words (or communication as a whole), some of their expressivity. This is what could explain why, in these notes, the same word can be written in several different ways. Ultimately, it was an attempt at salvaging the expressivity of language, at preserving the power of speech. The authors looked for means typical of writing to express what existed in speech. For example, they doubled some of the letters, or they used accented letters—*é, ò, ŭ.*

Conclusions

The notes from the front and from captivity stand up, I believe, to the task of reclaiming and filling in missing pieces of the cultural history of a large group, namely the community of Transylvanian peasants that in 1914, at the outbreak of the war, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in 1918, at the end of it, was part of a different state. Studying the notes produced by the very soldiers who constituted the bulk of the troops sent to the front, we can grasp some of their cultural world and their identity. Their testimonies take an epistolary form that was quite widespread at the time, with standardized introductions, developments, and conclusions, as well as a general verse structure.

The letters or journals are fragile, silent yet valuable vestiges that capture the very transition from oral culture to written culture. The texts of the letters are not only memory facts but equally "transcriptions of oral statements," as described by Bazin and Bensa (1979: 8).

They show us today a new face of ourselves, as in a mirror, but the time

elapsed since they were written creates an effect of distancing, inaccessibility nonetheless. At a first reading, these texts can be difficult to decipher. To understand them, to make them once more accessible, one must account for the "ingredients" and the conditions of their making: the existence of a shared, preponderantly oral fund of peasant culture; the superficial internalizing of writing typical of the beginning of literacy acquisition in rural communities; the particularly extraordinary pressure and the impact of living through the war; and last but not least, each author's personal talent in using the shared repertoire of oral culture and his improvising skills.

Once deciphered, these writings reveal both elements that make up the shared oral repertoire, which are put into verse, and each author's skill in setting in writing a unique form, bearing the mark of his own creativity and originality. Each of them had his own way of choosing and combining the formulas borrowed from the shared oral repertoire, the result being a personal creation that he, the soldier-author, felt the need to sign. As he integrated orality into writing, the individual was captured in the middle of a creative process. The transition from orality to writing is also the transition from collective creation to individual creation. It thus becomes apparent how differences between oral and written cultures raise the question of the individual's role in the creative process, as Goody remarked (1979: 73).

Postcard from Szfară Augustin to his family, preserved in the *Letters from the First World War* Collection, National Archives of Romania, Cluj Branch.

NOTES

1. Translator's Note: What is now southeastern Poland and western Ukraine.

2. Translator's Note: All the English translations of the excerpts of letters in verse in this article aim to convey the meaning of the soldiers' writings as faithfully as possible given the specific difficulties of the Romanian original. Nuances pertaining to versification, register, and style of writing were inevitably lost in translation.

3. Translator's Note: The Royal Hungarian *Honvéd* was the Hungarian counterpart of the Austrian *Landwehr*, one of the four armies of Austria-Hungary from 1867 to 1918, along with the Common Army and the Imperial and Royal Navy.

4. Translator's Note: *Landsturm* is a term used in German-speaking countries to designate a reserve army force mobilized in times of war.

5. Translator's Note: *Jäger* is a German military term referring to specific light infantry units typically used in the early modern era.

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Recording One's Own Oral Culture: A Case Study of Locals' Notebooks

Diana Mihuț
West University of Timișoara, Romania
diana.mihut@e-uvt.ro

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ABSTRACT

Interest towards communities characterized by oral tradition has taken the form of ethnological and/or anthropological field research on this topic over the past two centuries. With the invention of the tape recorder, the difficulty of recording field information was reduced as it enabled real-time recording of testimonies provided by informants; the process became even more accessible once digital information storage became available. In parallel with the efforts of the researcher—*outsider*—to document realities considered relevant for the culture of traditional societies, some of the *insiders* became aware of the need to write down such information, which they recognized to be defining for their own social group. This article thus focuses on a particular practice in writing down ethnographic information, namely the existence of notebooks in which oral texts of different types and with different functions are recorded. To build the argument, I draw on the example of such notebooks held by the Folklore Archive of the West University of Timișoara, namely five manuscripts signed by Gheorghe Andraș, a teacher from Sânnicolau Mare, a small town in western Romania. Written in the first half of the twentieth century, these notebooks are statements of the inner calling their author felt to write down this type of ethnographic information, under the influence of national policies supporting ethnographic field research.

KEYWORDS

Private notebooks; micro monographs; folklore archives; insider's perspective; interwar Romania.

Introduction

This article centers on a particular practice in writing down ethnographic information, namely the existence of certain private notebooks containing transcriptions of oral texts. For this reason, the main method used in the article is descriptive. These personal notes are written records focusing on cultural facts specific to traditional communities, i.e., characterized by orality, in the first half of the twentieth century. Such notebooks are a statement of the inner calling their authors felt to write down ethnographic information that described cultural realities specific to their own community. It is well known that the nineteenth century brought about an increased interest for folk culture and local history under the influence of the nation-state building movements. Mainly due to an accelerated literacy acquisition process at the time and under the influence of national policies supporting ethnographic field research (see Hedeșan 2005), such writings occurred especially among small local rural intellectuals. This paper thus aims to present a case study focusing on some short ethnographic private writings held by the Folklore Archive of the West University of Timișoara, Romania. These writings consist of five thematic notebooks written by Gheorghe Andraș, a teacher from Sânnicolau Mare. Today Sânnicolau Mare is a small town in Timiș County, situated in western

Romania, in the Banat region. Written in the interwar period, these manuscripts were preserved in very good condition. Four of them are typed, most likely after the initial recording of the information and by another person since the typed text includes corrections. However, it is sure that Gheorghe Andraș, an insider, is the one who wrote these texts based on the observations he made in the community where he lived.

Each notebook is meant to provide information on cultural facts considered specific to interwar Sânnicolau Mare. The notebooks are rather concise, briefly recording and classifying ethnographic information from the end of the 1930s. Their thematic classification suggests the author's concern for carefully organizing the information he had gathered. In addition, he constantly tried to provide details on the space and time when he found relevant information on a certain topic, as a scrupulous researcher would have done. However, his oral style and his attention to some details bring his manuscripts closer to an insider's approach, a personal notebook meant for recording the oral reality of a traditional world increasingly threatened by the social changes of the early twentieth century.

The main purpose of this study is to point out the existence of this category of manuscripts that most often remain unknown to the public. It thus aims to provide an example of recording orality and to underline the most important feature of such an approach. The analysis is useful as far as it underlines the existence of a pattern in recording cultural facts specific to oral communities. It is well known that, especially since the second half of the nineteenth century, oral cultures were considered to require a special effort to be recorded. Naturally, this current appeared and gained prominence with the emergence of nation-states. The necessity of such dedicated writings/documents derived primarily from the need to preserve some of their specific elements against oblivion. The spread of written cultures led to the emergence of libraries as knowledge storage systems. Next, the development of economic and political systems gradually led to the construction of information storage systems. Given their administrative component, these archives grew constantly in size as the various types of information were collected according to specific needs (maps, property documents, censuses, etc.). Their creation was, generally speaking, related to the emergence of different institutions all over the world. They are therefore synonymous with official power, while oral communities functioned according to a set of unwritten, parallel rules:

> Archives were developed in ancient cultures together with writing systems and bureaucratic structures of organization. In their primary function, they served the ruling class with the necessary information to build up provisions for the future through stockpiling. They also served as tools for the symbolic legitimation of power and to discipline the population. Examples of such political archives are, for example, the Inquisition files or the files compiled by the East German State Security (Stasi). Archives always belonged to institutions of power: the church, the state, the police, the law, etc. (Erll and Nünning 2008: 102).

The idea of intangible cultural heritage was not legislated until 2003. In France, the term *patrimoine*, the equivalent of the English term *heritage*, had an almost exclusively administrative use until the second half of the twentieth century. It gradually entered public discourse as officials in the Ministry of Culture began to use it to designate a general inventory of monuments in France (Heinich 2012). The early 1970s marked both the adoption of the World Heritage Convention (1972) and the first discussions on the need for measures to safeguard folk arts. These were the first official measures

taken to differentiate the built heritage from the rest of the cultural practices specific to oral cultures. Perhaps this late reaction of the authorities involuntarily determined some people from the oral communities to begin to write themselves about cultural realities that they observed, writings which are not to be found in the official archives. It seems that these people had an inner call to write down about their own culture, creating manuscripts which they could not disseminate but nonetheless ensured the preservation of information. I would like to point out that this article is primarily a careful analysis of such manuscripts which are my main documentary resource. Therefore, bringing them to the public's attention is a necessary contribution. Relying on archive documents that did not have the chance to be widely disseminated, the article has a substantial descriptive part that I believe would be its main merit. Therefore, I will frequently resort to quoting some passages that I consider relevant for understanding the author's approach. I am convinced that the author's systematic choice to introduce certain explanatory information that accompanies the basic text, or on the contrary, the omission of others, is relevant to understanding how he relates to the realities he writes about. As these quotes are extremely pertinent in the original language, the footnotes provide their exact transcription for potential Romanian readers.

In preparing this article, I did not use a monographic approach, identifying all of Gheorghe Andraș's possible writings. Such an action would be a separate project in the extended process of the recovery of ethnographic archive documents. The current article capitalizes on all his writings held in the Folklore Archive of the West University of Timișoara. However, these manuscripts should not be considered outside the larger context of the Romanian interwar sociology approaches which contributed decisively to shaping the country-wide monographic project. In this context, awareness of the need to document ethnographic realities appeared in and penetrated almost all societal layers. Field research campaigns led by specialists were organized as part of the ambitious monographic project that led to the creation of the Bucharest School of Sociology (see also Rostás 2016). Built around the personality of Dimitrie Gusti, several research campaigns for monographs were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, with funding from the Royal House of Romania. Among the best-known communities investigated were Cornova, Drăguș, Runcu, Nerej, Fundu Moldovei, Șanț, Rușeț, etc. The publication of several monographic volumes was the result of these interwar campaigns (see, for instance, Stahl 1940). The second important moment of ethnographic research in interwar Romania is represented by Ion Mușlea and his project to gather ethnographic information with the help of intellectuals from villages located within the borders of Greater Romania, from the result of the 1918 Great Union. In the period from 1930 to 1948, Ion Mușlea distributed a set of questionnaires by post, the answers to which remained locked in the Folklore Archive Institute of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca for the entire duration of the communist regime. Efforts to restore this important documentary fund only began in 2014 (see Mușlea 2014; Timoce-Mocanu et al. 2015).

In interwar Banat, there was no specialized higher education available in this part of Romania that could have imposed scientific research rigor. There were no specialists or researchers who could have provided training on research methods. Only Timișoara's Polytechnic University had been established by King Ferdinand immediately after the end of the First World War. As a result, the method used for research at that time would have been left rather to one's own imagination of how this process should be carried out. Despite the lack of a clear methodological context,

several research campaigns for monographs were carried out in Banat. Regarding the publication of fieldwork information, the Journal of the Banat-Crișana Social Institute published some of the studies, while only two monographs were published, dedicated to Belinț and Sârbova (also see Negru 2013).

Gheorghe Andraș's Manuscripts (1): Riddles

The first notebook I focus on is Manuscript no. 1850, *Ghiciturile* [Riddles]. The notebook contains sixteen typewritten pages. The first page provides a brief overview of the content of the manuscript, as well as the context of documentation. It is important to mention that the author of the manuscripts analyzed in this article tends to provide original definitions for the typology of the content he is documenting. The reason for his option remains unknown, but it was most likely due to his personal preference. Andraș's position is between that of an insider and that of an outsider. He was an insider of the creative and practicing community, understanding the mechanisms that generated certain cultural facts, since he lived in the community he wrote about. However, he also tried to adopt the outsider's perspective, that of either researcher or reader. Since Andraș understood that an outsider constantly needs explanations, he briefly described the processes that regulated the described cultural fact. Consequently, he proposed his own definitions and sometimes provided detailed descriptions. Riddles are specific to oral literature, and Andraș defines them as follows:

> Riddles are short sayings usually produced by the Romanian people at claca.* Their content is based on judgment and imagination, and they are meant to be solved by the public [gathered] at these bees. Riddles are a test for the sharpness of mind and the spirit of observation of those who take part in solving them. Riddles are didactic as they have educational content, pursuing the same goal.[1]

The manuscript dedicated to riddles is the most accurate in terms of the context of field data collection. This document depicts the author more as a researcher than an amateur from the community. He thus acknowledged that the information he recorded had been gathered by his students:

> The following riddles are widely known in our village. They were collected by local secondary-school students. Consequently, I would like to thank my former students, from the local school, who were in the third and fourth secondary-school grades in 1938 and 1939 and who collected most of these riddles.[2]

The manuscript documents over eighty riddles well-known among community members in the 1940s. They are structured according to two criteria, indicating the author's care for the source. Therefore, the riddles are classified into three categories, based on the person who documented them, and then alphabetically. There are two nominal collections: Ioan Nereianț's, a third-grade student, and Adriana Raica's, a fourth-grade student. The third collection appears to be a collective one, containing several riddles heard by a group of pupils at a bee. The vague description of the context in which the last collection was documented does not exclude the possibility that these riddles were well-known to all members of the community, including the teacher who deemed them important enough to have them included in the manuscript. Without any other supplementary classifications or descriptions, the author wrote down all the information he considered relevant for the topic at hand. Thus, beyond the common riddles to be found in such a collection, the current notebook also contains a series of questions in-between logic and

mathematical calculation. The presence of many such hidden equations, spelling or new geographic realities can be the consequence of the students' participation in the process of gathering information: "A woman sent a boy to buy her 20 eggs for 20 lei–goose, duck, and chicken eggs. The goose egg cost 5 lei, hen, 2, and duck, 1.50. How many eggs did the boy buy from each kind?"[3] "A tree is seven meters high; a snail climbs it; it goes up three meters during the day and two down at night. How many days will it take the snail to reach the top?"[4] "How many years is a child who is one thousand months old?"[5] "How can we travel to America without going there? (Letter by mail)."[6] "What do day (*ziua*) and night (*noaptea*) end with? (letter *a*)."[7]

Gheorghe Andraș's Manuscripts (2): Songs

The second manuscript I analyze is Manuscript No. 1860. Entitled *Cântece legate de obiceiuri* [Songs related to customs] it is the poorest notebook in terms of content. The notebook's cover explains which are the songs it refers to: *Anul Nou* [New Year], *Turca*,[8] *Bocet* [Mourning song], and *Păpăruga* [Rainmaker]. But the content provides information related only to wedding ceremonial poetry (*din poezia obiceiurilor la nuntă*): song for wedding guests (*cântecul mesenilor*) with lyrics and music, two variants for the song of the bride (*cântecul miresii*), a blank page dedicated to the song of the groom (*cântecul mirelui*), a blank page dedicated to wedding *strigături* [shouted songs], and the music score for a wedding march. It is an enigma to me why precisely a manuscript dedicated to an apparently generous topic is so poor in content. Consisting of only six handwritten pages, it includes the complete score of only one song (both music and lyrics), the lyrics for two other songs, and the melodic line for a fourth. However, it also includes blank pages that were supposed to be filled in later with wedding songs. The current manuscript is the only handwritten notebook from the series and, even though it seems it was initially meant to include many types of ritual songs, includes only wedding ceremonial songs. In addition, its third cover ends with the mention "see my folklore collection notebook." Unfortunately, I was unable to retrieve such a manuscript so far. Moreover, the same observation is to be found on the last page of Manuscript No. 1850 *Ghicitorile* [Riddles]. Manuscript No. 1860 is characterized also by the concern for accuracy in identifying the source of the information: "Song of the bride. Lyrics version 1: lyrics and music heard from Elisaveta Petrașcu, nicknamed Cioncu, 65 years old, on May 25, 1935."[9] "Song of the bride. Version 2 from another village – lyrics and music heard from Maria Nedelcu, nicknamed Buica, [blank] years old, heard today [blank]."[10] The existence of the blanks is itself proof of the writer's desire to be rigorous, to use field research methods. On these occasions, the author looks more like a researcher than a member of the community.

Gheorghe Andraș's Manuscripts (3): Nicknames

Manuscript No. 1862 contains a heterogeneous collection of information. Entitled *Poreclele sau supranumele din localitatea noastră* [Nicknames or bynames from our village] the notebook includes eighteen typewritten pages covering not only the well-known nicknames of people from Sânnicolau-Mare but also a detailed presentation of two customs and a satirical text. The most important part is dedicated to nicknames which are defined also as "bynames from our village."[11] Since the use of nicknames prevailing over the use of a person's name and surname may seem unnatural for an

outsider, the author chose to explain their necessity. Moreover, he provided a personal definition and an etymological explanation:

> In our village, in addition to the family name, every family or every person also has a nickname or byname, by which the person is known better and more easily. The nickname is mockingly given to or received by a family or a person in connection with a physical or moral feature, or a physical or mental deficiency. The word poreclă [nickname] or prolecă comes from the Slavic word Porekla, while the word supranume [byname] comes from the French word surnom, having the same meaning. In our village, we have identified the following nicknames or bynames, in alphabetical order, with some explanations included.[12]

Following this minimal explanation meant to familiarize the reader with the ethnographic reality described, over 300 nicknames are reviewed. A list of forty local diminutives is added, also considered to be a specific element of the local traditional culture. However, the author was convinced of the importance of nuanced differences between nicknames and local diminutives, essential for the villagers when it came to identifying themselves. Therefore, he defines the local diminutives as "words created using a diminutive suffix or abbreviation. They have a note of endearment; most often they evoke a resemblance [of the person] with the original word."[13]

In addition to nicknames, Manuscript No. 1862 provides three additional pieces of information: a practice related to Saint George's feast, i.e., *Udatul fetelor* [Watering of girls], a traditional practice performed at the beginning of the Easter fasting period (*ali-morii-ciacii-morii*[14]), and a parody of religious inspiration dedicated to drunkards. The watering of the young girls on Saint George's feast (April 23) is one of the customs meticulously described in Andraș's notebooks. The preliminaries to the practice are presented in detail, as well as the part where the young men searched for the young girls in order to sprinkle them with water. The most intriguing aspect related to the transcription of this custom is the corrections made. Like other manuscripts, the current one was typed and later corrected. Since some of the mistakes are grammatical and not simple typing errors, I assumed that at least one correction was made by the teacher Andraș himself, and someone else had typed the text. One of the persons who intervened in the manuscript considered that the custom was not accurately described in terms of "solemn act" (*act solemn*). Thus, the phrase was censored twice, "groups of four to five young people ... preparing to perform this practice which is a solemn act both for them and the entire village"[15] being rephrased as "groups of four to five young people ... to perform these actions."[16] A few paragraphs below, for the original text "on that day they would not put on their best clothes but worn-out ones; but [they would put on the best clothes] only after the completion of this solemn act"[17] two corrections were suggested. The first suggestion was to replace "worn-out clothes"[18] with "everyday clothes,"[19] and the second, to eliminate the structure "only after this solemn act is completed."[20] I emphasize the existence of such rephrasing suggestions because I find them important in understanding how different people understood the same cultural fact and its relevance to the community. An ethnographic document, be it a peasant's notebook, an amateur researcher's notebook, or a professional manuscript, can overemphasize the importance of one practice over another, as an effect of the emotional involvement of the one who records. There is a risk of creating the false impression that certain practices are representative for traditional communities as a result of possibly overstating their importance. The risk increases when taking into consideration the time when the first written records

related to a specific culture were created. Thus, the suggestions for corrections made to Manuscript No. 1862 provide a good example of amending the text to tone down the importance given to a practice that, most likely, the manuscript's author considered characteristic for the community about which he wrote. Nevertheless, caution should be always exercised in understanding these cultural facts, especially since such a text does not provide clear information either on the date and place of performance or the informant: "Today, this beautiful custom, so much enjoyed by the whole population of the village, is not forgotten. There are only a few grandmothers who still remember it and are proudly telling their small grandchildren about it."[21]

According to his description in this manuscript, the author seems to understand *Ali-morii-ciacii-morii* as a local ritual practice typical of the first days of Lent. Its detailed description flows naturally, focusing on the enthusiasm it generated. Unlike all the other themes discussed, this time the author showed an utter lack of interest to provide details related to the source of the information. Therefore, full attention goes to the practice of the ritual and the social cohesion it created, without any supplementary explanation:

> Encouraged by the youth, schoolchildren would go about all day carrying straws, cobs, or any other sources of fuel to ensure the greatest possible success of the event. These materials were arranged on a street corner, on the eve of the beginning of Lent. During this period of childish feverish work, the rest of the village was not passive either.[22]

Credeul beţivanului [Drunkard's creed] is the fourth topic approached in Manuscript No. 1862. It is a satirical text which does not seem to honor the community but is recorded nonetheless. Once again the source is not quoted. Towards the end however, the text includes notes explaining some of the regional words that the drunkard used in his prayer. The inclusion of such a marginal text in itself yet significant for the community, along with the descriptions of the watering of the girls and *ali-morii-ciacii-morii* practice, make Andraş's approach here more akin to a peasant's perspective.

Gheorghe Andraş's Manuscripts (4): Sayings

Manuscript No. 1861 is sixteen pages long and dedicated to *Strigăturile sau zicăturile* [Shouted verses or sayings]. Andraş defines these creations as follows:

> [L]ocal fables in the form of shorter texts, consisting of two or four verses, but serving the same purpose to rebuke moral, social, and physical defects, which are uttered at times of joy during dances, occasioning a lot of fun and humor. They are associated with dancing, as they are shouted with the rhythm and background of the dance song.[23]

The source of the information for this manuscript is very diffuse. The vague definition of the documentation context indicates that the author already knew this information from his previous personal experience. As a result, he provided a general description of the source of the eighty-seven shouted verses transcribed later: "I found out some of these shouted verses from the village elders, and yet others I heard myself on different occasions, such as weddings or different holidays, etc."[24] In addition, the manuscript dedicated to the shouted verses contains some additional explanations based on two examples meant to illustrate the feelings that these verses gave rise to among those who shouted them. The explanations are clumsy, but persevering and extremely relevant especially for a native Romanian speaker. Although they might seem childish

today, these clarifications indicate a real concern on the part of the writer for the accurate perception of the role and meaning of these verses as a practice specific to the oral culture that he was trying to record: "'May the one who dances but does not shout have his mouth deformed.' With this shouted verses, its author wants to put more joy in the dance atmosphere."[25]; "'Let's hit the ground so hard that the soup jumps out of the pot,' here the author insists on [the others] showing more energy while dancing."[26]

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Gheorghe Andraș's Manuscripts (5): Charms

The largest one, Manuscript No. 1858 counts twenty-three pages. Entitled *Descântatul sau modul de vindecarea boalelor* [The charm or how to cure diseases], it focuses on presenting charms as magical healing practices. It begins with a reflection on what diseases meant for the traditional communities:

> The way the locals would put it sixty or one hundred years ago, as well as the contributing factors to the treatment of diseases. When the human body was not afflicted by something, the man considered himself healthy. But when he felt pain in any part of the body or an organ, he considered himself suffering or sick. The disease could be mild, severe, or extremely severe. That depended on the intensity of the pain. And in this case, the man or family members would search for help quickly, resorting to different factors, which according to their faith could determine healing.[27]

The proposed definition uses an empirical description of the pain in its physical manifestation identified as an unnatural state. According to the description, the disease is a reality understood as a disturbance of health, and being healthy is considered the natural state. Since the disease is a disturbance of the normal state, the community should first look for an explanation for this disturbance. Therefore, the manuscript insists on making its reader aware of the existence of a general cause for the diseases, according to the beliefs of the oral community:

> We ought to begin by knowing and understanding the explanation given by people to the occurrence of diseases, both in the case of humans and animals. People believed that the diseases were determined by several factors. According to people's beliefs, the determining factors which brought about or promoted either epidemic diseases, or for that matter diseases in general, were supernatural. They were either sent by God as punishment, or brought about by spells due to enemy plots, or by charms. So the people sought to cure them by using similar means, that is prayers, charms, but especially by undoing charms.[28]

Medicinal plants, in various combinations, are also mentioned as being used to treat certain diseases. Interest for the study of plants and their uses in the traditional Romanian communities begins in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the activity of Simion Mangiuca and Simion Florea Marian. However, "since its beginning Romanian ethnobotany has focused firstly on the linguistic importance (vernacular names and their origin), empirical and medicinal use, and the spiritual importance of plants (used in specific customs)" (Ivașcu and Biro 2021: 67). So Andraș's manuscript too pays much attention to the preparation and use of these plants, which is in the responsibility of some skilled elderly women in the village. The way these practices are recorded creates the impression that the community practiced a special form of traditional medicine in which massage techniques and the use of medicinal plants, doubled by the proper charm,

treated a number of diseases. However, the manuscript describes these practices as a specific, shared, independent set of healing actions in opposition with institutionalized, science-based medicine, which the patient rarely used and, most often, when it was too late:

> When someone showed signs of illness or was already suffering, he went to a witch, a priest, a sorceress, and only if none of these factors proved to be effective, he went for a medical consult. In most cases, however, the doctor could no longer help: the disease had got too bad in the meantime.[29]

These were the steps a person from the village would take to treat his/her illness. But he lists over sixty major diseases in the treatment of which charms and its associated practices were considered to be effective. Bronchitis, pneumonia, tuberculosis, rheumatism, toothache, digestive disorders, fever, skin diseases, bites, sprains, etc. are just some of the most common diseases treated with the help of charms. Andraş mentions these diseases using both their common names that the community recognized (i.e., toothache or drunkenness) and the medical terms (i.e., dental abscess or alcoholism). So in listing them, the author made sure to translate/ provide the necessary explanation for an outsider. In addition, the attention he paid to their classification indicates an increased preoccupation for recording information. He thus identifies thirteen categories of diseases for which charms were considered effective: throat diseases, chest diseases, diseases of the circulatory system, digestive diseases, diseases of the reproductive organs, infectious diseases, skin diseases, injuries, diseases of the nervous system, eye diseases, ear diseases, diseases specific to children. Considering the variety of these categories, it is obvious that the community he wrote about had its own treatments for all the common diseases that could affect its members. The effort to record and explain the symbols/meanings that the community attributed to these practices is constant and signals awareness of the cultural differences existing between communities. The writer is aware of the need to provide explanations to the outside reader to whom these cultural realities may feel strange. Given the particular nature of the subject of charms, the contextual explanations are broader in this manuscript than in the others. Of all the notebooks, the one dedicated to charms is the most descriptive. There is information related to the general context of the practice of charms at the time of writing the text. So the reader learns that the charm was used as a healing method mainly for children and less often for adults. Additional information is provided on who could practice charms and the context of the performance. "In order for the charm to be effective, people's belief was that the person who does the chanting should be an old man or an old woman. But the first condition that the woman had to fulfill was to have her menopause already, to have no contact with men, to be very clean."[30] The manuscript identifies three women as the last charmers of the community. Particular attention is dedicated to identifying the source and providing a description, no matter how brief, of the context of information recording: "Informant is old woman Ana Tăşculă, 68 years old. Information gathered on November 10, 1938"/ "Information gathered by Măria Drăgoi, third-grade student in secondary school, in the winter of 1938" / "The informant is the grandmother of Veronica Subota, third-grade student in secondary school, information gathered in the autumn of 1938." In addition to the chanted ritual texts, details related to the ritual practice are given: "After performing her introductory ceremony by saying a regular prayer, as a sign of receiving the gift in order to cure the sick, the woman sits behind the sick, and for the entire duration of the prayer and the charm, she gives the patient a small massage with lukewarm

water or spit."[31] Another example underlines even better the importance of the massage in the healing process:

> Before beginning the charm, the woman says the usual prayer, then takes a chair and places it in the middle of the house for the patient to sit on, after which she goes on to perform the charm. The old woman sits behind the patient and massages his neck by pressing the tonsils, dipping her fingers in lukewarm water, or spit, throughout the time it takes her to say the charm.[32]

A subsequent instance of capitalization of the information recorded by Andraş is a short folklore monograph of Sânnicolau Mare (Andraş et al. 1972) written by Gheorghe Andraş, Ion Samoilă, Elena Ilcău, Veronica Sârbescu, and Marin Popa, in the early 1970s. The idea of writing such a text occurred to the authors following a local folklore symposium organized on January 30, 1972. On the occasion of preparing this monograph, a small quantity of the primary material gathered by Andraş was used as a source. In the process, the material was improved; the writing was refined to comply with the requirements for monographs. Only two of the themes documented by Andraş in his private notebooks were taken up in this monograph: nicknames and musical folklore, with several chapters dedicated to them. Thus, the nicknames constitute a separate chapter that aims not only to list them but also offer some explanations of their origins. A separate chapter deals with the most common names of the inhabitants from Sânnicolau Mare. The names are listed and accompanied by explanations of their evolution, including clarifications about the persons who, according to tradition, have the right to choose the child's name (mother, father, godfather, etc.). However, neither of the two large chapters is authored by Andraş, but by Samoilă. A separate chapter is dedicated to New Year's customs, also authored by Samoilă. The musical folklore related to rituals is described within a separate chapter, the only one written by Andraş. The texts of the wedding song he had recorded in Manuscript No. 1860 are taken up again here, together with several dirges, including *Zorile* [Dawn]. This time, however, there is no concern for identifying the source of the information. Space and time references for the documentation are missing. Unlike personal writings, the monograph is, paradoxically, meant precisely to disseminate information to the public. However, readers are faced here with one that omits important information regarding precisely the context of the research.

Conclusions

From an analysis of these notebooks, I will draw some general conclusions related to the methods used in recording orality starting from several questions: *who*, *where*, *when*, *how*, and *why* is writing. Firstly, *who* is the person who does the recording? And what is his relationship with the community he writes about? While writing on these topics, Gheorghe Andraş was a teacher in Sânnicolau Mare, his hometown. He was therefore an insider, but an insider who aimed to distance himself in such a way as to make his discourse objective. He was therefore neither a completely lay person nor a researcher. He could be best characterized as a self-taught in-between who, under the influence of context, decided that he must use his position and knowledge in order to record in writing the reality of his community. This *known* reality—which used to be called *tradition*—seemed to be no longer in harmony with a *new* one, brought about by the interwar period together with modern institutions and a new lifestyle. In fact, this was the reality of written culture(s) that threatens the oral one(s). Despite his strong emotional connection with the world

he was writing about, the author made efforts to adopt a *regard éloigné*. Similar to a researcher, he constantly tried to provide explanations for some of the described cultural facts, most likely under the effect of studying a minimum bibliography. As already shown above, the explanations for the practice of charms are perhaps the most illustrative in this regard: "Charms are very old vestiges preserved from the most ancient times when civilization had not yet formed its first cradle, so they can be considered to be of an anthropological nature. They originate in people's belief that diseases are of supernatural origin ..."[33]

The next questions are *where* and *when* was the text written and the cultural fact practiced? Manuscripts provide clear information on the spatial and temporal context of practice: (our) *village* and (x) *years ago*. If the spatial element remains constant, time seems to be constantly changing. It is obvious that the author documented all these realities at the end of the 1930s, as he sometimes mentions. While the exact time of gathering the information is missing, the author provides details about the time of the most recent performance or about the frequency: "about sixty or seventy years ago, on St. George's Day this custom was still practiced."

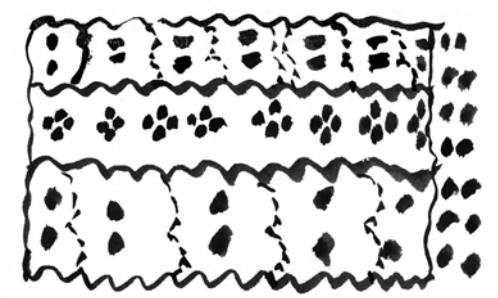
The next question is *how*. Considering *how* the research was made, it seems that the author himself was taking into consideration that his research methodology was likely to be questioned later. Therefore, the author was always careful in what concerned the identity of his informants and the context in which the information was gathered. In addition to direct observation and participation as a member of the community, he also relied on his students to gather information, and he openly admitted it. Several examples were given above. However, when he mentions his informants he acts like a field researcher. The written information thus appears to be more reliable than if the author had relied only on his memory. The collective source(s) he mentions several times may be seen as proof that the author knew the facts he was describing in his capacity as an insider. When asking *how* the selection of the themes to be recorded was made, or *how* was the text written, there are several aspects to be taken into consideration. The author focuses on recording information related to cultural facts considered to have a high degree of local specificity, such as local nicknames. The author provided a description as detailed as possible. Priority was given to those that seemed threatened by extinction: charms, shouted verses, different customs. It may not be a coincidence that most blank pages are to be found in his "Lyric" manuscript, which he had yet to research. Living in the investigated community provides a certain advantage while writing about its culture. The author's access to information is almost unlimited in terms of describing the reality; thus, it may create the impression of completeness enclosed in a notebook.

Nevertheless, when it comes to understanding *why*, what motivated the author, I would also take into consideration the exterior cultural context, as well as personal motivation. In the opening of the article, I reviewed the cultural context that led to an awareness of the necessity of recording information related to oral cultures. Despite this exterior element, there was an internal drive that determined people from traditional communities, either literate peasants or rural intellectuals, to record information they deemed relevant for the community. They gathered all these pieces of information in manuscripts kept in personal or institutional archives, with almost no chances to be used and widely disseminated. The initiators of such endeavors had a certain level of education and cultural background that differentiated them from other members of their communities, which nevertheless did not make them researchers, despite their attention to detail and sincere passion for writing. For instance, in his notebooks, Andraș always tries to explain

what a certain cultural fact symbolizes, how it is understood, what its deeper meaning is. Sometimes he tries his hand at etymologies and classifications. Yet other times his texts flow naturally reflecting the participant's emotions, e.g., Manuscript No. 1862. Given their thematic mix, teacher Gheorghe Andraș's writings resemble rather field research notebooks. Without a detailed thematic classification, they record a variety of facts specific to a particular community. While not elaborated enough to be understood by the public, they could be the raw material for another researcher willing to do more in-depth fieldwork.

These notebooks focus on some cultural facts that classical Romanian ethnography failed to record as they were at the time of their collection. The Second World War and the difficult years of the communist regime led not only to a change in the priorities of individuals and institutions, but also to a radical change in discourse, under the impact of censorship. A few years after the 1989 Revolution, several projects were launched to bring certain ethnographic information collected in the interwar period or even earlier to the attention of both professionals and the public. Some of these records are preserved in institutional archives (as in the case of the present manuscripts), or in personal archives where they are still waiting to be (re)discovered by researchers as topics of individual or group research projects. In addition, the years following the 1989 Revolution also saw the resuming of an older national project to recover various ethnographic information, namely that of the Romanian Ethnographic Atlas.

Still, the manuscripts remain an indisputable proof of the existence of various beliefs and practices specific to traditional communities. A series of minor private writings, such as the one analyzed within the current study, can therefore contribute to the defense of small oral cultures, bearing witness to their diversity. Some of these writings have been silently waiting in some institutional archives for the appropriate social and political context to be finally put to good use. The Folklore Archive of the West University of Timișoara is itself an example of an institution that in recent years has been trying to reorganize and digitize its documents. But the project of the Romanian folklore archives is a separate and long discussion, especially in the context of the lack of a national strategy in this regard (see also Hedeșan 2015). The classification of the document holdings and making the data accessible is a task to be solved by the institutions that own them. Just like some oral cultures failed to be recorded in writing because of neglect, others were saved by the involvement of conscientious members.



NOTES

* Translator's Note: *Claca* is a type of voluntary collective work usually performed in Romanian villages as a form of reciprocal farm labor and followed by a party.

1. [Romanian]: *Ghiciturile sînt produse scurt spuse, de obicei de poporul român, la clăci. Conținutul lor se bazează pe judecată și imaginație, care să fie ghicite de auditorul prezent la o șezătoare. În ghicituri se arată ascuțimea minții și spiritul de observație al celor ce iau parte la deslegarea lor. Ghiciturile sînt de gen didactic avînd conținut educativ, urmărind același scop*. (Ms. 1859, p.1)

2. [Romanian]: *În localitatea noastră se cunosc următoarele ghicituri a căror circulație este foarte cunoscută, colectată de elevii* școalei *secundare din localitatea noastră. Țin să mulțumesc pe această cale foștilor mei elevi ai claselor III și IV gimnaziale din anii 1938 și 1939, de la școala gimnazială din localitate, cari au colectat cea mai mare parte din aceste ghicituri.* (*Ibid*.)

3. [Romanian]: *O femeie a trimis pe un băiat să-i cumpere 20 de ouă cu 20 de lei. Ouă de gâscă și găină. Cel de gâscă a costat 5 lei bucata. Cele de găină, 2 de un leu. Câte ouă a cumpărat din fiecare?* (Ms. 1859, p. 9)

4. [Romanian]: *Un pom are 7 m înălțime; un melc se suie pe el; 3 m se urcă ziua și 2 m coboară noaptea. În câte zile va ajunge în vârf?* (Ms. 1859, p.15)

5. [Romanian]: *Un copil de 1000 de luni câți ani are?* (Ms. 1859, p. 10)

6. [Romanian]: : *Cu ce putem merge în America fără a merge acolo? (scrisoarea prin poștă).* (Ms. 1859, p. 7)

7. [Romanian]: *Cu ce se termină ziua și noaptea? (cu litera a).* (Ms. 1859, p.15)

8. A custom practiced on the occasion of Christmas and New Year which involves the performance of dances by a young man disguised as a goat.

9. [Romanian]: *Cântecul miresii. Variantă ca text I: text și melodie auzită de la Elisaveta Petrașcu, zis Cioncu – în etate de 65 de ani, în ziua de 25 mai 1935.* (Ms. 1860, p. 2)

10. [Romanian]: *Cântecul miresii. Varianta II dată în alt sat – text și melodie auzită de la Maria Nedelcu zis Buica – în etate de (spațiu liber) ani, auzită azi (spațiu liber).* (Ms. 1860, p.3)

11. [Romanian]: *poreclele sau supranumele din localitatea noastră*. (Ms. 1862, p.1)

12. [Romanian]: *În localitatea noastră fiecare familie sau fiecare om, pe lângă numele de familie, își are și un supranume sau poreclă, după care este cunoscut mult mai bine și mai ușor. Se dă sau se primește mai de multe ori în bătaie de joc, unei familii sau unei persoane în legătură cu o caracteristică fizică sau psihică fie un defect fizic sau psihic. Cuvântul de poreclă, local prolecă, provine de la cuvântul slav Porecla, iar cuvântul supranume provine de la cuvântul francez surnom, având însă același înțeles. În localitatea noastră am putut însemna următoarele porecle sau supranume aranjate alfabetic, la unele și cu explicația lor*. (*Ibid*.)

13. [Romanian]: *Cuvinte spuse cu ajutorul unui sufix diminutival sau prescurtare. Este o notă alintătoare, mai de multe ori și mai ales în cazul de față este o asemănare evocând o asemănare cu cuvântul de bază.* (Ms. 1862, p. 8)

14. The name of this practice is given by the exclamation *alimori* that the group utters around a big fire lit on this occasion.

15. [Romanian] *grupuri de câte 4 – 5 tineri (...) formându-și planul desăvârșirii acestui act solemn pentru ei și pentru întreg satul.* (Ms. 1862, p. 10)

16. [Romanian]: *grupuri de câte 4-5 tineri (...) pentru a face aceste acțiuni*. (*Ibid.*)

17. [Romanian]: *în ziua respectivă nu se îmbrăcau în haine de sărbătoare – numai după săvârșirea acestui act solemn, ci în haine uzate. (Ibid.*)

18. [Romanian]: *haine uzate*. (*Ibid.*)

19. [Romanian]: *haine de toate zilele*. (*Ibid.*)

20. [Romanian]: *numai după săvârșirea acestui act solemn*. (*Ibid.*)

21. [Romanian]: *Azi, acest frumos obicei și atât de mult savurat de toată populația satului, nici nu se mai cunoaște, doar câte o bunicuță care-și mai aduce aminte cu multă mândrie de acest eveniment și-l povestește nepoțeilor.* (Ms. 1862, p.12)

22. [Romanian]: *La îndemnul tineretului, copiii de școală în ziua respectivă, toată ziua cu un du-te vino cărau cu brațele paie, tulei și alt material de ars, pentru a putea da o reușită cât mai mare acestui eveniment, ce se aranja la un colț de stradă, cu o zi înainte de începerea Postului Mare de Paști. În această perioadă de muncă febrile copilărească, nici restul satului nu era pasiv.* (Ms. 1862, p. 15)

23. [Romanian]: *fabule locale, mai mici ca text, formate din două sau patru versuri, dar urmăresc același scop: biciuirea moravurilor urâte, defecte morale, sociale și fizice, arătate în momente de veselie în timpul dansurilor, producând mult haz și umor. Sunt însoțite de dans, fiind spuse în ritmul și fondul melodiei dansului.* (Ms. 1861, p. 1)

24. [Romanian]: *O parte din aceste strigături le-am cules de la bătrânii satului, iar parte le-am cules și auzit eu la diferitele ocaziuni: nunți, diferite sărbători etc.* (*Ibid.*)

25. [Romanian]: "*Cine joacă și nu strigă,/ Facă-i-se gura strâmbă" Aici, autorul, în această strigătură, vrea să pună mai multă voioșie în atmosfera dansului*. (*Ibid.*)

26. [Romanian]:*"La pământ cu talpa goală,/ Să sară și zama din oală." – aici insistă la o mai mare energie arătată în joc. (Ibid.)*

27. [Romanian]: *Cum s-au exprimat localnicii acum 60-100 de ani, precum și factorii contributori la vindecarea boalelor. Atunci când organismul omului nu suferea de ceva, omul se considera sănătos. Dar atunci când omul simțea o durere în oricare parte a organismului sau a unui organ, s-a considerat suferind sau bolnav. Boala putea fi considerată mai ușoară, gravă sau foarte gravă. Asta depindea de intensitatea durerii. Și în acest caz, omul sau membrii familiei căutau cât mai repede să apeleze la diferiți factori, care potrivit credinței lor puteau determina vindecarea.* (Ms. 1858, p. 1)

28. [Romanian]: *De la început trebuie să știm și să cunoaștem care era credința omului asupra ivirii boalelor apărute la om, chiar la animale, în acel timp. În popor era credința că ivirea boalelor sau aducerea lor era determinată de mai mulți factori care provocau sau aduceau omului și chiar animalelor boala. Factorii determinanți care aduceau sau promovau fie boalele epidemice, fie în general orice boală, erau în credința poporului de natură supranaturală, fie că sunt trimise de Dumnezeu, ca o pedeapsă; fie trimise prin vrăji datorită uneltirilor dușmane, sau prin farmece. Deci poporul căuta ca tot prin mijloace adecvate, adică prin rugăciuni, prin descântece, dar mai ales prin desfacerea farmecelor, să fie vindecate.* (*Ibid.*)

29. [Romanian]: *Când omul dădea semne de îmbolnăvire sau era deja suferind, mergea la o vrăjitoare, la un preot, la o descântătoare, şi numai în cazul când niciunul dintre aceşti factori nu au dat semne de îndreptare, se recurgea la un medic, adică la consultarea medicului. Dar, în cele mai multe cazuri, ajutorul medicului, în acest caz nu mai putea fi de folos: boala fiind de cele mai multe ori prea învechită.* (Ms. 1858, p. 3)

30. [Romanian]: *Descântatul, ca să aibă şi leac, credinţa în popor era ca respectivul sau respectiva să fie om bătrân sau femeie bătrână. Dar, ca primă condiţie de îndeplinit era ca femeia (baba) să fie trecută de periodul lunar, adică menopauză, să nu aibă contact cu bărbaţii, să fie foarte bine îngrijită.* (Ms. 1858, p. 7)

31. [Romanian]: *Baba descântătorare, după ce îşi făcuse ceremonialul de introducere, prin rugăciunea obişnuită, ca semn al primirii darului pentru a putea vindeca bolnavul, aşezată în spatele bolnavului, neîncetat adică în decursul rugăciunii şi al descântecului face fricţiunile obişnuite cu apă călduţă sau chiar cu schipieţi (...).* (Ms. 1858, p. 13)

32. [Romanian]: *Înainte de a începe descântecul, baba descântătoare îşi face rugăciunea obişnuită, apoi ia un scăunel pe care îl aşează în mijlocul casei unde stă bolnavul, apoi trece la practicarea descântecului astfel. Baba, aşezată la spatele bolnavului îi face o fricţiune la gâtul bolnavului apăsând gâlcile – amigdalele, înmuind înainte degetele în apă călduţă sau cu scuipat, atâta timp cât durează descântecul.* (*Ibid.*)

33. [Romanian]: *Descântecele sunt râmăşiţe foarte vechi păstrate încă din cele mai îndepărtate timpuri când nici civilizaţia nu-şi formase încă primul ei leagăn, deci pot fi socotite şi considerate de natură antropologică. Ele pornesc de la credinţa omului că boalele sunt de origine supranaturală (...)*. (Ms. 1858, p. 3)

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When People Write as They Speak: An Analysis of Letters Left on the Miraculous Graves of Bellu Catholic Cemetery

Florenţa Popescu-Simion
"Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, Romania
florenta.simion@gmail,com

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ABSTRACT

Starting with the second half of the twentieth century, a number of graves from Bellu Catholic Cemetery in Bucharest became the stage of a ritual. The allegedly miraculous graves achieved fame due to different and, in some cases, random characteristics. Many people (most of them Greek-Orthodox, not Catholics) come to perform this ritual to have their wishes fulfilled. As an important part of the ritual built around these graves, its performers are leaving written notes on them, containing their wishes. The notes are often handwritten on different pieces of paper (notebook pages or even receipts), although they may also be typed on a computer and printed. In rare cases, the performers leave notes written on the back of printed photos. My research consisted in observing the ritual, talking with a small number of people who performed it, and, most importantly, analyzing the notes left by the graves. All the performers I interviewed were women, and most of them (with one exception) strongly disapproved of the practice of leaving notes. Nevertheless, judging by the great number of pieces of paper I found by the "miraculous" graves every time I went to Bellu Catholic Cemetery, this practice seems to be general and deemed to be effective.

The paper I propose is, therefore, focusing on the analysis of those notes. The way they are handwritten or typewritten, as well as how their content offers valuable insight into the performers' social identity, religious affiliation, and level of education, as they contain specific formulae, spelling errors, and professional or personal wishes. The "secondary orality" (Zumthor 1972) involved in these texts is an important element of the "vernacular religion" horizon (Primiano 1995) to which the performers of the ritual obviously belong.

KEYWORDS

Urban ritual; prayer letters; popular akathists; vernacular religion; orality.

Preliminaries

It is common knowledge that orality was characteristic of *Homo sapiens* long before we invented writing. And at the same time, ever since the beginning of written culture, there was a tension, a competition between the two forms of communication, oral and written. On this subject, Walter Ong notes that "writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into 'grapholects'" (Ong 2002: 20).

Our Western culture could be therefore considered deeply typographic (to use the term coined by Walter Ong), even in what concerns the less educated, therefore more orality-bound, population of a country. This frame of thinking and communicating could cause people to forget about the importance assigned to the spoken word in oral cultures, which results in all kinds of folk productions, such as spells, curses, an even euphemistic names for fear-inspiring beings.

Nevertheless, it is of great importance for folklore scholars to keep in mind that "writing is a 'secondary modelling system,' dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language. Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality" (Ong 2002: 20).

This paper aims to stress the tension existing between orality and writing in the consecrated space of a Bucharest cemetery where a special ritual developed over the years. Every time a cemetery goes under the magnifying glass of a researcher, the notion of *lieu de mémoire* will spring to mind. The concept, defined by Pierre Nora, seems to be all-encompassing and all-explaining, since the space of the cemetery itself calls for it to be interpreted as such. In Pierre Nora terms, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations" (1989: 24). A cemetery is neither an entirely public place, nor an entirely private one. Due to this ambiguity of status, it is a repository of memories and a privileged space for folk imagination, a threshold where the contact between the living and the dead is still possible. This is why, in traditional communities, the cemetery occupied a special place, being the scene for both different funerary rituals and magical practices, the latter officially rejected by the community, who nevertheless tolerated them secretly. It is precisely this in-between characteristic of cemeteries that make them natural *lieux de mémoire*, which "only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications" (Nora 1989: 19). And the cemetery that is at the centre of this case study is by all means a very strong *lieu de mémoire*, as shown by the ritual itself that coagulated in its space.

The Cemetery and the Ritual

This paper is a case study, centered on a ritual which takes place in Bellu Catholic Cemetery, one of the most important and oldest cemeteries in Bucharest. In order to understand the tension between writing and orality that this ritual implies, it is necessary to present the cemetery and the history of the ritual.

In the 1850s, in a time of great administrative changes for the city of Bucharest, who had just become the capital of the young state of Romania, the municipality established several cemeteries in the southern part of the city, to be used by the main religious denominations: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Armenian. All these cemeteries, still in use today, formed a sort of "city of the dead," now totally incorporated in the city of the living which continued its expansion around and beyond them, the consequence being that the cemeteries now occupy an almost central location in Bucharest.

The Orthodox and Catholic cemeteries, situated on the left-hand side of Șerban Vodă Boulevard, one of the city's main arteries, are forming a complex together with the military cemetery, which is situated between them, and the cemetery of the Heroes of the 1989 Romanian Revolution. The Orthodox and Catholic cemeteries are commonly known as "Bellu," after the owner of the land transferred in 1850 to the municipality for the purpose of building this "city of the dead." Probably starting with the second half of the twentieth century, people developed some devotional practices around a number of graves from Catholic Bellu. The Romanian sociologist Irina Stahl was the first to analyze this phenomenon from multiple points of view. In a study entitled *The Nine Miraculous Graves: Seeking Help from Beyond* (Stahl 2015), she presents the history of the cemetery in relation with the beginning

Apple offering at Olguța's grave. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

and, respectively, the expansion of several practices, among which candle lightning and requesting the dead to mediate or to fulfil different (material, social, and spiritual) wishes formulated by the believers.

According both to Stahl and other people interviewed, including the oldest caretaker of Catholic Bellu cemetery, these ritual practices originated in the devotion towards the grave of an eight-year-old girl, Olguța Gambara who, the story goes, was killed by her father in 1912. Many years later, a woman prayed to her grave and her prayers were answered. The news about this miracle spread slowly but constantly and, consequently, people began to pray at Olguța's grave. In 1981, her sister, who was living in Canada, asked the Romanian communist authorities to allow her to move Olguța's remains to her new country. Instead, the Romanian authorities levelled out the grave and buried the remains of the girl in a secret corner of the cemetery. But later, one of the women whose prayers were heard erected a cross on the grave site, transforming it into a cenotaph. On the cross's plinth, one can read: "I sleep, don't cry."

Nevertheless, it seems that a devotional ritual was already well developed at that time and other graves had become part of it (Stahl 2015: 520). Among them, two graves belonging to a Catholic cardinal and a Greek-Catholic bishop, both victims of the communist persecutions, four groups of graves belonging to Catholic priests, teachers, and nuns, and also the grave of an unknown orphan child, a family grave (Petelenz), another family grave (Rogalski) distinguished by the chains that encircle the tombstone, and two graves decorated with statues: one statuary representing a woman and a little girl, and another statue of an angel placed on a high plinth. Nowadays, apparently there is a total known of thirteen graves or groups of graves which are included in the devotional and prayer request ritual.

Food offering on the Rogalski grave. In the background the notes left by the graves are visible. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

In two other studies (Popescu-Simion 2020; Nubert-Cheţan and Popescu-Simion 2020), all the parts of the ritual have been extensively presented, therefore I will just give an overview of it in this paper.

The performer chooses between one and nine graves which will make the object of her devotion ritual, for nine days in a row. Then, starting usually on the right side of the cemetery, at Olguța's cenotaph grave, she performs the ritual counterclockwise in front of each of the chosen graves, in the following order: lighting a candle in a candle box provided for this purpose by the cemetery administrators; praying to the grave while touching its tombstone or cross; (for some) placing on the grave a piece of paper containing the wishes of the person, generally in a (more or less) hidden place; leaving the grave taking care not to retrace one's footsteps; in the last day of the ritual, leaving an offering on each grave, such as cakes, biscuits, fruits, water, flowers, and even small amounts of money.

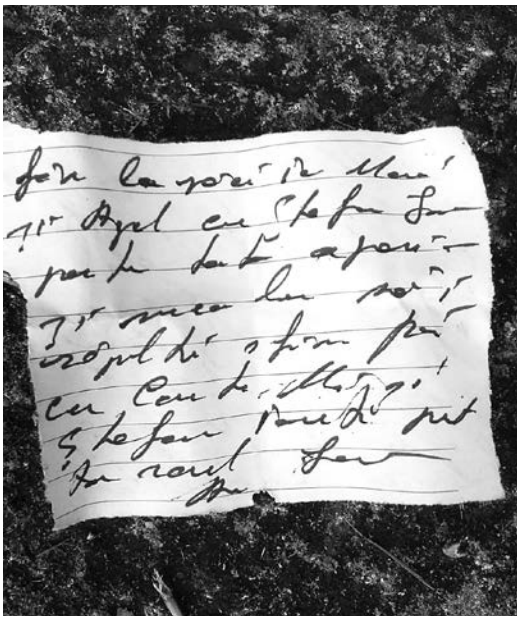
Although many of the people interviewed in the cemetery did not seem to approve of the written notes and could not provide the information about the right moment during the ritual to leave them by the graves, these notes could nevertheless be found in large numbers around. As Irina Stahl put it, "The notes are often well hidden in the holes and cracks of the funerary monuments. Sometimes there are so many that they cover the graves and the ground around them. The content of these notes varies: it can be very short, merely a name, or it can be very long and similar to the akathist that Orthodox believers bring to church" (Stahl 2015: 522).

The practice of leaving "notes" in places considered holy is far from being singular; it is also far from being unique to Romanians. There are places in Romania (most famously, Saint Andrew's cave and monastery in Dobrogea, the *Dintr-un Lemn* Monastery in Vâlcea County, and Radu Vodă Monastery in Bucharest) where believers are known to leave notes containing prayers, akathists[1] and *pomelnic*—lists of living and dead persons handed by family members to the Orthodox priests with the request to pray for their souls during mass. Notes containing prayers are also common in many other cultural and religious spaces, such as Bulgaria or Croatia (in specific churches), Turkey and the Muslim world (next to the graves of famous holy people), or Israel (in Jerusalem, in the cracks of the Wailing Wall).

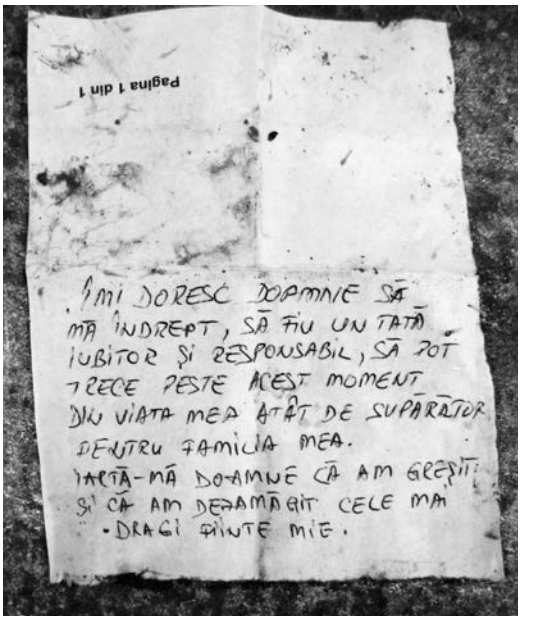
The phenomenon is representative of a magical worldview. In many cultures, including traditional Romanian culture, writing is believed to be imbued with magical power, or even to be a magical act itself, given its "capacity to conserve and to transmit a message," sometimes in combination with ritual acts (Ofrim 2001: 173). Therefore, when you think you have chased it away, orality returns triumphantly, and the words take back their original magical power. It is not paradoxical at all to discuss about magic in religious places, because "the opposition between the clergy and the laic mentality is far from being clear. In an oral culture, any religious formula is strong on its own" (*Ibid.*: 200). The chasm between magic and religion is not, in fact, as impenetrable as one may think; if we look at folk representations of religion, we will discover that in fact we can rather talk about a magic – religion continuum, the two being fully interlinked. Thus, magic and religion are complementary. Or in Ofrim's words, "in folk mentality there was no fracture between magic and religion" (*Ibid.*: 200).

The Notes Left by the Graves

From 2016 to 2019, my colleague Mihaela Nubert-Cheţan and I did a survey of Bellu Catholic Cemetery, observing the ritual and its performers, conducting interviews with



Note by the Angel grave. Some spelling errors are present. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.



Note written in capitals, not an usual practice in Romania. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

some of them, and taking pictures of the notes left by the graves. The survey is part of a large research project of "Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, consisting in identifying and observing the mutations which take place nowadays in the structure of rituals and customs.

The large quantity of notes "collected" during these fieldwork sessions could be grouped into several categories: (1) according to the "type" of grave: nuns' and priests'; Greek-Catholic martyrs'; common people; untimely (or violent) deaths; graves adorned with specific ornaments or having an unusual morphology; (2) according to the gender of the performers of the ritual; (3) according to the real recipient (the writer of the note or another person); and (4) according to the themes of the requests.

Of all these categories, I concentrate on the themes of the requests, as they are written in the notes left by the graves. They seem to belong to two main categories: material requests (requests for good health, a better job, a better salary, success at exams, buying or selling houses and/or cars, having success in legal matters, etc.) and social-spiritual requests (for good fortune, forgiveness of sins, marriage, removing spells, defeating enemies, personal development, etc.).

Therefore, this study focuses on the notes containing specific keywords, such as charms, spells, cure from evil. The analysis is restricted, finally, to just five of these notes, grouped according to the level of emotional and personal involvement of the believer in the request.

It is important to specify that, by the markers of orality contained, all the notes left by the graves seem to express a sort of contract, or rather a pact between orality and writing. This is due to the fact that the magical practices are oral practices par excellence and writing is for them just a secondary vehicle. The words take their strength from being pronounced, so in the case of the silent words written in the notes, which are meant to be only read by some supernatural beings, the power is transferred to the act of writing. Two more

observations are required. The first is that people seem to leave copies of the same notes next to different graves. Also, several copies of the same note were placed by the same grave. This could be considered strong evidence of the fact that leaving the notes next to graves is indeed a very important part of each stage of the nine-day ritual.

The second observation is that the graphic form of the texts depends largely on the shape of the paper used by the supplicants. They generally used small pieces of paper, not larger than A5 size. Their internal structure could be either of akathist prayers or charms that can remove evil spells. Also, the original graphic form of some of the texts includes different spelling errors, which are unfortunately lost in translation. As a general rule, I would suggest that the more these errors occur, the less literate the sender is, resulting in him/her being closer to orality.

N. (woman),
L. (woman),
M. (man),
M. (woman)
Health, harmony, ***forgiveness*** *of sins, good fortune,*
a bigger salary, job promotion, success in everything, [success] in selling and buying an apartment.
Removal *of spells, curses, oaths, diseases, enemies, accidents.*
(Collected on June 26, 2018; the "Mother Candida" grave, in the German nuns group of graves.)

The first part of this note is in the form of the specific Orthodox prayer called *pomelnic*, which is supposed to list the names of all the members of a family. There is no mention of the addressee; the request seems to be made to the divinity, but there are no clear markers of address.

The body of the note displays a series of requests, going from the spiritual ones (harmony, forgiveness of sins), passing through some very mundane requests (bigger salary, success in selling an apartment), to asking for both spiritual and material protections (forgiveness of sins or removal of curses, on one hand, and protection against enemies or accidents, on the other).

Thus, the note seems to be a combination between a prayer and a protection charm. It could belong to the category of what Artur Gorovei called prayer-spells, recorded since the late 1700s (Gorovei 1931). This kind of texts, usually chanted and probably also created by priests, were meant to protect the people, the household, or the farm animals against the evil. The note does not distinguish between formal religion practices and magic. On the contrary, the supplicant moves freely from magic defense to natural defense, from the spiritual to the material register.

I, O. (man),
pray *the Good Lord and the Sweet Mother of the Lord and the Holy Trinity*
for forgiveness of ***sins****,*
[of] ***curses***
by nine relatives,
by baptism and wedding godparents,
for cleaning me of ***spells and charms***
which have been put on me,
either ***by eating,***
drinking,
soiling
or by my ***stepping on crossroads****,*
let your tears, Sweet Mother, ***clean*** *and* ***wash*** *me,*
from the top of my head/hair to the soles of my feet*,*
let me be ***cured*** *and* ***anointed****,*
let me be ***cleaned*** *through Maria the sinner.*
(Collected at July 27, 2017; Olguța's grave)

This note is special because the supplicant is a man. The addressees of the letter are mentioned from the very beginning of the text, immediately after the name of the supplicant. Also, unlike the first note, this prayer is not at all specific. If, in the first case, the words allow to guess behind

them the real person who prays for mundane advantages (a good job, more money, a good house, etc.), this second note provides no details about the person, except the name and gender. The reader cannot guess what ails him, the reason of his performing the ritual is not mentioned. Nevertheless, what is to be remarked is his insistence on healing his spirit. He does not have any material requests. Even when he asks for health, it is in relation with spiritual purification (anointment).

A characteristic of this text is that it is full of folklore formulas: "curses by nine relatives," "my stepping on crossroads," "from the top of my head to the soles of my feet." Also noteworthy is his invoking the magic of the number "nine," which is typical of spells, both good and evil, and thus a marker of magical thinking.

Last but not least, it is important to mention that this note is not handwritten, but typed on a computer. This particular feature is apparently in contrast with the magic formulas mentioned above. The mixture of traditional content and very modern technology used to write it (very likely chosen because it was easier for the supplicant to obtain the necessary number of copies for performing the ritual), together with the fact that the supplicant is a man give a clue about the level of education of the writer and of his/her profession. The ambiguity of the pronoun comes from the fact that it is not possible to know if the writer and the supplicant are the same person. In fact, the word "Amen," added in handwriting at the end of the note, could be an indication of the nonidentity of the writer with the supplicant. However, this remains just speculation, since any information that could support one hypothesis or another lacks from the note.

The content of the text oscillates between sins (to be forgiven) and spells and charms (to be removed), both of them considered to be the cause of the supplicant's misfortune. The focus of the text is both propitiatory (forgiveness) and apotropaic (cure). The latter objective is very clearly stated, as results from the three times repetition of the verb "cleaned" (of bad spells, through tears, through Mary). This repetition indicates the efficiency of the spell and also, the powerful need for purification experienced by the supplicant.

Akathist (Prayer)
C. (woman)
prays *you, holy grave:*
the same way *these chains* ***were broken****,*
so may *the envy, the hostility,* ***spells****,*
curses ***be taken away*** *from me.*
Help *me, holy grave,*
[so] may *the envy and hostility of M., E., A. (N.), I., and A.* [all are female names]
be broken
and ***taken away*** *from me.*
Amen.
(Collected at June 26, 2018; the "Chains" grave)

While, in the first two notes, the addressee is the divinity, either named or not, the writer of the third note directs her request to the "holy grave." As I mentioned before, this is not something special. Rather, the majority of the texts recorded are calling to the power of the holy graves. The importance of the grave as a dispenser of a cure can be inferred from the fact that the supplicant begins by using the third person, as it is customary for intercessory prayers, but soon she switches to the first person, as in the direct prayer.

The text is structured in two parts, both appealing to sympathetic magic, centered on the chains ("the same way these chains were broken, so may the [...] curses be taken away from me"). The term of comparison ("chains") is mentioned only once, but it structures the entire text around it. In contrast, the envy and hostility (of the enemies) are mentioned twice, being thus singled out as the most important causes of distress for the supplicant. The evil spells and curses are

also mentioned. The supplicant also seems to know the cause of her problems: five women, who are named in the text as bearers of envy and hostility; the supplicant even wrote their names in capitals to make them more visible for the miracle-making authority who would presumably read her note.

The naming of the evil doers and the principles of sympathetic magic help to identify this text as a protection spell. The supplicant definitely believes in the power of the grave by which she leaves this note. The Rogalski (or "chains") grave was used for love spells in the past, either maleficent or benevolent, because of its initial chain ornament. This particular feature, combined with the legend of the grave (known to be of a young woman who died either during her wedding, or shortly before it) contributed to the Rogalski grave's being associated with spells and charms. The news spread among people that the chains from this grave were a powerful instrument of magic. This feature gave the grave a particular importance in the group of miraculous graves. A few years ago, the owners of the Rogalski grave removed the chains, very likely in order to dissuade the people from performing magic rituals around it. But the effect was not what they hoped for. As the analyzed text shows, the people integrated the removing/breaking of the chains in the economy of their prayers, using this fact as an analogy for solving their problems. It is a clear demonstration that the grave has a "life" of its own and, as in the case of Olguța's grave, once a legend comes to life, it incorporates all. In conclusion, it is no more up to the owners to remove the grave from the ritual circuit.

The last observation about this note is that the supplicant named it akathist. The beginning of the note analyzed, written in the third person, is typical of the akathist prayers, and it is not an exaggeration to suppose that the supplicant knew them well. But the body of the text suggests that it rather belongs to the category of protection spells.

M. (woman) ***prays***
for the ***removal of spells****,*
for God to take L. (man) away from me.
M. ***prays***
to have the spell blocking marriage undone.
I ***pray***
for my good fortune.
M. ***prays***
to have the evil which looms over her house removed.
I ***pray***
for health and success, at home and at work.
Amen.
(Collected at March 25, 2016; the "Chains" grave, the professors-priests group of graves)

This note and the previous have a common feature: the indecision about the personae of the discourse. The supplicant, another woman, is not sure about the right way to address her requests. But, unlike the third note, in this case the oscillation characterizes the whole text, because the supplicant alternates between the third and the first person all the way to the end of her "letter." At a closer examination, one could discern a different class of requests assigned to each person. The third person is preferred for general spiritual wishes, such as "removal of spells," "having evil removed," "having the spell blocking marriage *undone*." But when it comes to personal wishes, such as "my good fortune," "health and success," then the first person is used.

This distinction is not sharp, as there is overlap between the personae now and then, as shown in the first paragraph: "M. prays […] for God to take L. away from me." It is possible to assume that this request represents the core of the supplicant's note. The assumption is supported by the wish to the spell blocking marriage undone, expressed by the supplicant a little bit further. One needs to notice the ambiguity of the note in this respect, because it does not contain enough clues to understand if

L. (the man that the supplicant wishes to be taken away from her) is her husband or an unwanted suitor. Consequently, the "undoing of the spell blocking marriage" could be read either as the wish to be freed from an unhappy marriage, or a desire to have the path cleared so she can find a husband. In either case, the apotropaic intention of the note is clear.

> ***May*** *the Holy Graves hear my prayer*
> *and give me the solution:*
> ***may*** *M.(man) be freed from spells,*
> ***may*** *he have his* ***path, roads, eyes****, and* ***love opened****,*
> ***may*** *he return to C. (woman)*
> *and ask her to marry him and be his wedded wife.*
> ***May*** *M. leave the house in S. L. [street] as soon as possible,*
> ***may*** *him not stand S. (woman) and V. (man) anymore*
> *because of* ***quarrels, reproaches, frictions, slander*** *of S. and V. against M.*
> ***May*** *neither S. nor M. wish to marry each other anymore,*
> ***may*** *they give up the wish to legally own the house in S. L. [street].* ***May*** *M.* ***loose peace,***
> ***[may he] loose the wish to sleep and to eat***
> *together with S. and V. in the house in S. L. [street].*
> ***May*** *M. wish to* ***come back*** *immediately to C.,*
> *with* ***love, tenderness, peace, and marriage*** *forever.*
> *AMEN*
> (Collected at November 29, 2017;
> Petelenz grave/ The "Family" grave)

It is important to stress from the very beginning that this note has all the features of a love charm. The text is written in the third person, but the supplicant (C.) and the writer are the same person. The request is typical for love charms: the supplicant asks for the removal of the spells made by another woman in order to steal the man destined to her, while in fact she is the one who performs a love spell, trying to create bad blood between the members of the couple she wants to undo. The man of her choice is not allowed to have a free will, he is rather objectified, considered by the supplicant to be a sort of prey to be snatched back from the other woman. This is the typical structure of a love spell.

In order to repair her destiny, the supplicant performs a magic attack, which takes the form of a prayer. The beginning of the note should not deceive us. Despite the prayer formula, "May the Holy Graves hear my prayer and give me the solution," the note is, in fact, an imperative request. The subjunctive mood used in the original text in Romanian has all the functions of the imperative, being the grammar mood used par excellence in Romanian charms and spells, evil or protective. In this particular text, the use of the subjunctive mood helps to conceal the command (magic) by a prayer (religion).

The note represents an "autoperformance," a term coined by Nicoleta Coatu to describe a type of spell where the performer and the recipient are one and the same person (2004: 181). In this case, the autoperformance signals a fantasy wish for power, the hope to dominate the marital partner. In this magical structure, the psychology of anger and violence has a specific application: the active female performer (no more a supplicant, because she actually acts, she does not pray) takes action against the given order, trying to build another order that she considers right and preordained by the hand of the destiny. In fact, what the woman performs is a counter-spell, in her acceptance, in order to make sure that she will marry the right partner (Golopenţia 2018: 38) who for now has been lured into a wrong match.

The notes left by the miraculous graves led to think about their nature. Some of them are named akathists (prayers) by

the supplicants. Some have the structure of a letter addressed to a supernatural entity (God, the Holy Virgin, the dead in the graves or even the graves themselves). And some others are built on the structure of protection spells. The latter have a composition which is easily recognizable in the texts presented here. The main elements which recommend them as such are: the imperative invocation ("may..."); the spell formulas ("curses from nine relatives"), the final formulas ("let him/me be cured and purified"), the performing intention (neutralizing the evil spells, re-establishing the equilibrium of the world or of the person affected by the evil doers), the exhaustive identification of the causes of evil (either humans or supernatural entities); and last but not least, the internal cadences of the texts. This structure could be corroborated with that of the prayer books, especially the books containing prayers meant to protect the people, the crops and the domestic animals from spells and other evils. These books were in circulation during the past centuries and the priests or the clerks, as some of the few literates (Golopenţia 2007: 21), were those who helped them spread, since the Orthodox Church never denied the existence of the spells and charms (Gorovei 1931). In fact, the prayer books published by or with the approval of the Church contain two levels: the prayer, conjuring the Christian divinity, and the request to cast out the spells (Gorovei 1931). The structure of the texts from these prayer books is very similar with that of the texts collected during the fieldwork, which could lead to the conclusion that this type of structure circulated in different social milieus, switching with the centuries between the oral and written circuit.

Notes left by the Grotto grave. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

As can be easily discerned from the analysis of the texts presented in this study, most of them include all of the elements of protection spells, which is why it is possible to affirm they are indeed a special (written) form of spell. The fact that the receiver and/or the mediator are the graves seems to support this interpretation. The notes are left by the graves in order for the addressees to "absorb" their content, meaning that, as in the case of "regular" spells (spoken rapidly, in a low, whispered voice, or even just in one's head), no living person is supposed to read them.

As with the case of the ritual analyzed, there is no priest to act as an intercessor for the prayers, some of the women interviewed during the field research saying that they doubted the efficiency of the notes left by the graves. When asked about these texts, they replied with a rhetorical question: "Who reads them?"—meaning that if they are not read, then they are not effective. This statement contradicts the underlying principle of the custom of leaving prayer notes by many holy places in Romania (St. Andrew's Cave in Dobrudja, the *Dintr-un Lemn* Monastery in Vâlcea) or other countries (the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem

The Mother and Child grave. The notes are placed even in the inerstices of the statue. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

Woman performing the ritual, Mother and Child grave. Photo credit: Florența Popescu-Simion.

being only the most famous example). In these situations, the notes are either burned (because they are considered evil or, on the contrary, because this is how the prayers are thought to reach their destination more quickly) or buried. Regardless of how they are destroyed, the force of the written word is well-known and accepted. This is strong, even if indirect, support for the belief in the power of the notes left by the miraculous graves at Bellu Cemetery.

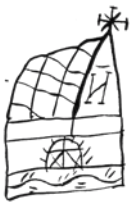
One last observation: in this short analysis, I made a distinction between magic (evil) spells, on one hand, and protection spells, on the other. In fact, for many scholars (Gorovei 1931; Candrea 1944; Golopenția 2018), both evil and protection spells are part of a continuum whose purpose is to manipulate the magic for a specific purpose, be it beneficent or maleficent. I can also add that what is good for a person is evil for another, the fifth note analyzed being a strong proof of that.

Coda

This case study has merely scratched the surface of an apparently surprising phenomenon: the perpetuation of written protection spells, which are in fact imbued with orality, in our time and in an urban space, as part of a ritual developed mainly by Orthodox performers in the twentieth century in a Catholic cemetery. The notes analyzed—or rather the written-oral protection spells as they ought to be called—are part of a continuum that is based on the magical power of the written word, which reaches across time and space. The practices of writing in this particular case seem to represent a sort of identifiable protocols, reiterated time and again with every new performance of the ritual. This way, the dynamic relation between orality and writing finds a delicate balance.

NOTE

1. The akathist is normally a hymn chanted in church during the mass, in honor of the Holy Virgin Mary. The congregation must stand during the chanting of this hymn. In Romania, the term is also used to describe the practice of asking the priest to pray for the fulfillment of a specific wish. The term is mostly used with this second meaning, although the practice is not officially accepted by the Orthodox Church.



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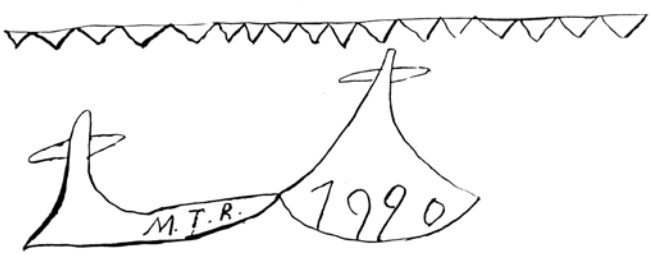
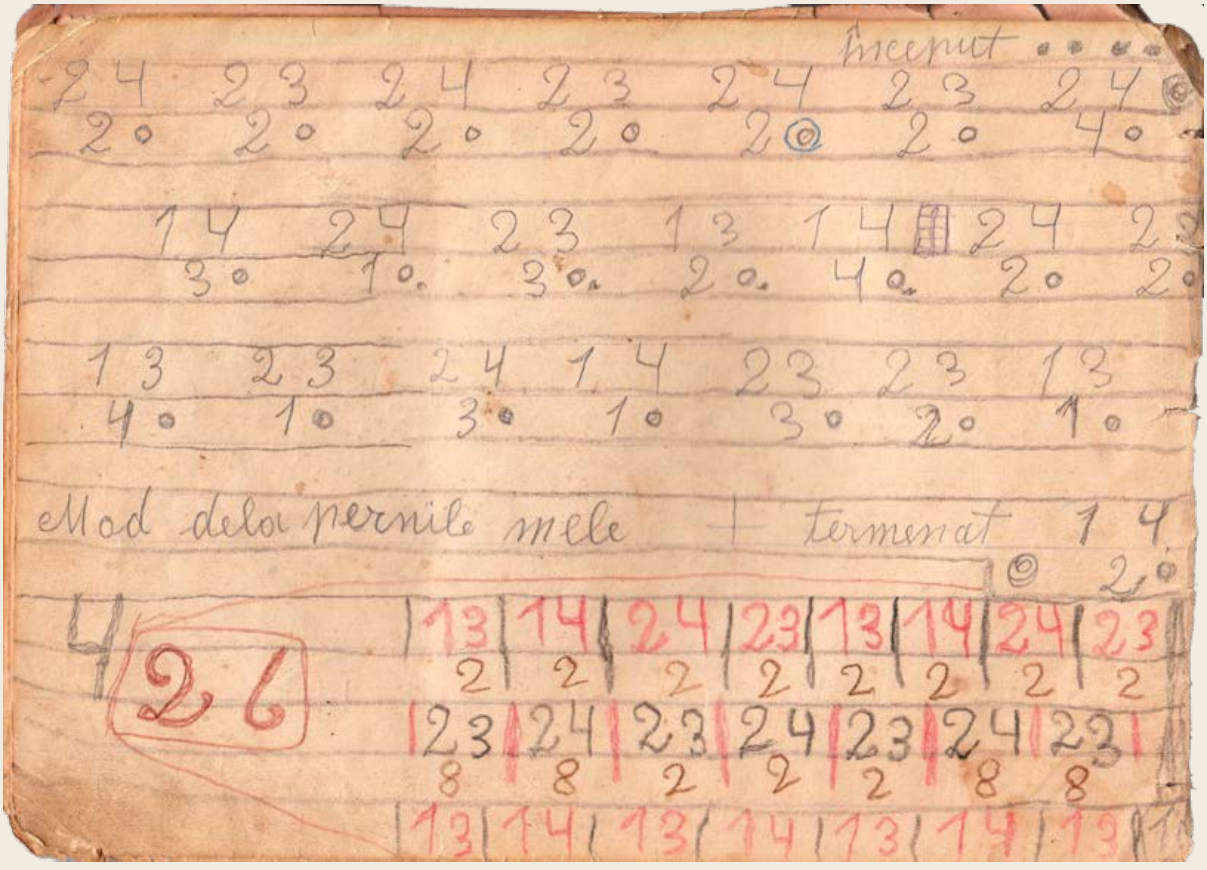
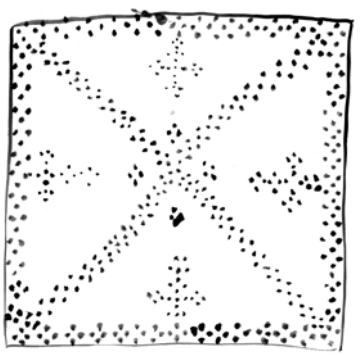




II. Orality as a Tool.
The Production of the Continuous Present



Expression corporelle et récit de soi à travers la médiation filmique : témoignages oraux de femmes macédoniennes confrontées aux violences de la guerre civile grecque

[Film-mediated Body Expression and Personal Narrative: Oral Testimonies of Macedonian Women Facing Violence in the Greek Civil War]

Christina Alexopoulos de Girard
Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, PLIDAM ; Université de Strasbourg, SuLiSoM, France
alexopoulos_8@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Traumatic experience goes far beyond the realm of speech. The body and the mind keep track of everything. But words struggle to describe what the subject has really experienced. The use of film as a documentary medium sometimes allows us to see how the reminiscences of a past that cannot be forgotten are expressed through the body. It transforms the camera into an object of mediation that makes it possible to approach areas of the unspeakable, to elaborate what has remained unresolved, and to give a primary form of representation to what has been frightening in individual and collective history. To speak with the body or through the body, to show a part of one's history, and to make the scope of the violence suffered heard engages a certain form of listening where the act of testifying joins that of recognizing, of naming and also feeling what happened. For these Macedonian women victims of ethnocidal practices, the full recognition of their trauma often requires body expression, as the body is the primary site of the violence endured. And the role of the film record is to restore aspects of the violence while providing the means to study its present and past significance.

KEYWORDS

Trauma; film mediation; narrative; body; macedonian women.

Introduction

Nous souhaitons explorer l'expression corporelle et le récit de soi à travers la médiation filmique dans le cadre de témoignages oraux que nous avons enregistrés lors d'une enquête de terrain consacrée à la restitution mémorielle de l'expérience de la guerre civile grecque (1946-1949) auprès de personnes issues de la minorité macédonienne du pays. Les récits de vie recueillis lors de ce travail de terrain effectué en 2010 dans l'actuelle Macédoine du Nord et ancienne ex-République de Macédoine de Yougoslavie, ont été filmés et analysés par nos soins. Ils correspondent à des entretiens non directifs visant à explorer la mémoire du conflit chez des Macédoniens de Grèce, obligés de quitter le pays pendant ou après la guerre civile, en raison d'un contexte social, politique, économique et militaire extrêmement difficile pour des populations globalement considérées par le gouvernement grec nationaliste comme proches de l'Armée Démocratique procommuniste (Alexopoulos-de Girard

2011a et Alexopoulos-de Girard 2015).

Le rôle de l'enregistrement filmique de l'entretien est au cœur de notre réflexion dans la mesure où ce support a pu permettre de consigner en temps réel et d'analyser dans l'après-coup de l'entretien, l'expression corporelle et verbale de personnes enregistrées en train de raconter leur histoire de vie. Il est d'autant plus important qu'au-delà de cette fonction de préservation d'une forme de narration non verbale, le support filmique a occupé un rôle de médiation lors de la réalisation des entretiens, dans le sens du *médium malléable* défini par M. Milner et R. Roussillon dans leurs travaux sur des objets ayant une fonction de transformation dans le cadre d'une écoute clinique ou d'un travail thérapeutique[1]. Cette fonction du support filmique en tant que médium malléable, renvoyant aux traces d'un moment de l'histoire subjective, saisissable, éprouvable, résistant, animable quand il est investi et indestructible dans ses fondements, est ainsi venue se rajouter à la fonction de préservation mémorielle précédemment citée en apportant de la sorte à ce que nous définissons comme *une médiation filmique* son double statut de création et de mise en lien intersubjective, d'un côté, et de consignation et de restitution mémorielle du récit, de l'autre.

C'est dans ce contexte de médiation filmique qu'il nous importe d'essayer de comprendre la place de l'expression corporelle dans la mise en récit, entendue comme tout ce qui accompagne l'expression langagière mais aussi tout ce qui se substitue à elle, la prolonge, la contredit, la transforme. En effet, dans le cadre de cette collecte filmée de narrations autobiographiques, nous avons été particulièrement marquée par des entretiens menés avec des femmes de langue et de culture macédoniennes, originaires de villages du Nord de la Grèce, ayant vécu la guerre civile et ayant subi des persécutions à la fois en raison de leur identité de genre (Alexopoulos-de Girard 2011b) et de leur appartenance communautaire (Alexopoulos-de Girard 2019). En menant les entretiens, nous avons constaté que certaines des femmes interviewées avaient vécu la guerre littéralement dans leur chair. C'étaient des personnes pour qui l'expérience traumatique de la confrontation au conflit s'était inscrite dans la mémoire individuelle et groupale à travers une perception sensorielle d'effraction et leur narration se référait souvent aux sévices et aux privations du corps. C'est ce constat qui a été au centre d'une hypothèse de travail d'abord induite par l'expérience de terrain, puis validée par l'analyse des enregistrements filmés. Il nous a donc paru lors de la réalisation des entretiens que les violences du conflit, les persécutions subies, l'exil forcé relevaient d'un vécu corporel dont la mise en parole ne saurait être pleinement entendue, si l'image, le son, le mouvement venaient à manquer. Il restait à déterminer dans quelle mesure, le travail filmique en enregistrant des aspects verbaux et non verbaux de l'expression de soi permettrait d'accéder aux différentes facettes d'une narration qui engage le corps, arriverait à éclairer des points aveugles d'une histoire marquée par le non-dit et transformerait la charge traumatique ayant longuement entravé le récit en travail psychique de verbalisation et de mentalisation ?

Ce questionnement sur ce que la médiation filmique arrive à restituer de la vérité singulière du sujet à travers la mise en scène et la captation de l'expression corporelle invite à une approche pluridisciplinaire engageant des outils de la psychanalyse, de l'anthropologie et des études cinématographiques.

Pour mieux appréhender la place de l'expression corporelle dans le récit de soi à travers les différentes fonctions de la médiation filmique dans des témoignages oraux de femmes macédoniennes confrontées à la guerre civile grecque, aux persécutions et à l'exil qui s'en est suivi, nous allons nous intéresser d'abord aux capacités expressives de la narration non verbale, puis

nous allons évoquer plus spécifiquement le parcours singulier de deux femmes pour mieux appréhender l'articulation du verbal et du non verbal dans leur récit, enfin il sera question des tentatives de restitution de cet aspect dans notre travail.

• • • • • • • • •

Expression corporelle et récit de soi, entre singularité et universalité, complémentarité et antagonisme.

L'expression corporelle est d'une importance majeure pour penser le récit non seulement comme une production langagière mais aussi et surtout comme une performance orale. Il s'agit alors d'une mise en scène associant dans sa réalisation différentes modalités de narration extra-verbale, allant de tous les éléments qui déterminent le déroulement de la prise de parole du point de vue de sa production sonore, à tout ce qui relève de la gestuelle et des mouvements du corps, des postures, des manières de se tenir, de regarder, d'écouter propres à chaque récit, autrement dit de l'image de la personne en mouvement. Comment penser les liens entre universalité des affects, particularité culturelle et singularité individuelle de leurs modes d'expression ? Quelle est la nature des liens qui unissent l'expression corporelle à la mise en récit de son histoire entre complémentarité et antagonisme des formes et des contenus ?

Certains éléments reliés à la production de la parole tels que l'intonation de la voix, le débit et le rythme de la personne qui parle, les moments de silence ou de modulation dans son énonciation, constituent des éléments relatifs à la fois à une expression langagière et à une mise en scène corporelle.

Intrinsèquement liés aux codes linguistiques d'une langue particulière et d'un système sémiotique propre à une culture, ces éléments n'en sont pas moins porteurs d'éléments universels que l'on retrouverait dans l'énonciation de personnes issues de cultures différentes, face à une situation similaire. La manifestation de la tristesse, de la colère, de l'angoisse est en effet, culturellement déterminée dans sa forme et en même temps, chargée d'une expressivité qui dépasse toute appartenance à un groupe particulier et qui peut être ressentie par des personnes issues de communautés différentes, à travers une communication des affects, des émotions, des éprouvés internes, indépendante même de la compréhension exacte du contenu linguistique d'un message.

Une communication non verbale est ainsi opérée entre la personne qui se raconte et celle à qui elle s'adresse, notamment dans le cadre d'un récit de vie. Cette communication peut être plus ou moins concordante à l'expression orale ou au contraire s'en émanciper pour se charger de dire tout ce que l'expression verbale n'arrive pas à restituer. Par moments, la communication verbale fait l'objet d'une tentative de maîtrise, de rationalisation, de restriction de ce qui est possible d'être dit alors que le corps lui se charge d'exprimer le décalage entre la parole énoncée et la vérité profonde du sujet. Une écoute formée à la psychanalyse peut permettre d'identifier ces moments défensifs étayés par l'enregistrement du corps en mouvement.

A d'autres moments, il s'agit d'une complémentarité entre les deux formes d'expression, le langage du corps venant ponctuer le récit verbal, y rajouter une certaine intensité ou l'inscrire dans une narration plus large, faite de caractéristiques constitutives d'une certaine expression singulière, propres à une personne ou à une situation, particulières à un groupe d'âge, de genre, d'appartenance culturelle. Des gestes monotones, répétitifs, surveillés, changeants, amples, restreints peuvent ainsi constituer autant de modalités de se raconter et de signes distinctifs, propres au style d'une personne, aux habitus d'une appartenance sociale, ethnique ou de genre, aux attendus

d'une situation de deuil, de séduction ou de conflit et ainsi de suite. L'écoute clinique mais aussi une connaissance approfondie des enjeux interculturels de la situation de communication peut permettre d'identifier la portée de l'intrication du collectif dans l'individuel et les limites de cette adhésion. Le corps peut autant servir les matrices narratives de la communauté que se positionner en porte à faux vis-à-vis d'elles en devenant le recours ultime d'un refus de souscrire au récit collectif.

Dans le cas qui nous intéresse, à savoir les récits des femmes macédoniennes, confrontées à des expériences de violence extrêmes la place du corps dans la narration est d'autant plus importante que le témoignage a pu être effectué dans différentes langues. Il est d'ailleurs important de questionner le passage d'une langue très présente au pays de leur jeunesse (la Grèce) à une langue très présente dans le pays qui les a accueillies (la Macédoine du Nord). La culture macédonienne constitue en effet la culture à laquelle elles se sentent reliées de par leur langue première, les origines de leur parents et leurs propres parcours de vie. Le passage de l'une à l'autre n'est pas le même dans les deux témoignages qui nous intéressent dans cet article, dans la mesure où la place psychique et sociale de chacune des deux langues n'est pas exactement la même dans les deux histoires de vie.

Il en est de même de la place du corps dans les différents aspects de chaque témoignage, d'où l'intérêt d'une analyse à la fois de la sémiologie des gestes et des expressions observés, des modulations de la voix dans l'alternance de la parole et du silence, d'une expression qui engage le corps des personnes, les intonations de leur voix, le rythme des événements traversés à travers leurs résonnances corporelles (voir Alexopoulos-de Girard 2021a et 2021b).

L'approche de l'expression corporelle dans les récits de vie que nous avons filmés s'inscrit ainsi à la fois dans la continuité de l'analyse discursive des témoignages et dans la rupture de la suprématie du verbe comme voie d'accès à la réalité du sujet. Elle est étudiée en référence à des attendus collectifs autrement dit des assignations de genre, d'âge et plus globalement de rôle social déterminées, mais aussi en décalage par rapport à ces injonctions communautaires et donc en relation avec des moyens expressifs qui parfois échappent au sujet même de l'énonciation, en court-circuitant son expression verbale dans ses aspects les plus normatifs. La singularité de l'articulation de l'expression corporelle à chaque témoignage filmé est ainsi mise au centre d'une réflexion sur la compréhension de ce qui ne se donne pas à entendre immédiatement alors qu'il est présent depuis le début.

Entendre, voir et filmer chaque témoignage dans son unicité

Entendre, voir et filmer chaque témoignage dans son unicité présuppose de revisiter les liens précédemment évoqués entre singularité de chaque narration, particularité de la mémoire groupale et universalité des mécanismes psychiques convoqués, ainsi que d'identifier la part de complémentarité et d'antagonisme de la narration verbale et corporelle dans l'expression des formes et des contenus. Il importe alors en premier de mener un travail de contextualisation des témoignages recueillis auprès des acteurs et actrices du conflit, puis une présentation de leur contenu et de leur forme en se référant aux moments les plus saillants du récit où justement le corps est davantage convoqué en appui ou en opposition à la narration verbale et à ses limites, une reconnaissance enfin des problématiques psychiques et sociales sous-jacentes à chaque récit.

Quelques éléments de contexte permettront d'entendre la singularité des témoignages collectés et des conditions de l'enquête. Ce sont des témoignages de femmes

macédoniennes qui ont été violentées durant la guerre civile grecque, entre 1946 et 1949, mais qui avaient déjà subi des persécutions en tant que membres d'une minorité précédemment malmenée par les différents pouvoirs en place (Kostopoulos 2000). Ces violences s'inscrivent dans l'héritage de la dictature fascisante de Metaxás (1936-1940) et les persécutions antérieures manifestes depuis le début du XXe siècle, et visent globalement une communauté perçue comme linguistiquement et culturellement « autre » dans une vision où cette altérité serait dangereuse pour la cohésion et la sécurité de l'Etat grec et dans une perception des traits identitaires comme politiquement connotés à gauche. Assimilés aux combats du Parti Communiste grec pour la reconnaissance des droits des populations minoritaires du pays au même titre que pour l'abolition de la monarchie ou l'accès à un régime plus démocratique pendant la guerre civile grecque, les éléments culturels de ces populations ont été appréhendés avec une grande hostilité comme autant de marques de trahison nationale. Les populations macédoniennes ont subi des persécutions massives au même titre que toute personne soupçonnée de sympathie avec les forces communistes de l'Armée Démocratique et, en même temps, elles ont fait l'objet d'attaques plus ciblées visant à les assimiler violemment et à défaut à les déporter, à les emprisonner et *in fine* à les faire partir du pays.

Notre enquête de terrain en 2010 nous a permis d'avoir accès à plusieurs dizaines de témoignages de personnes ayant expérimenté la guerre civile et l'exil de la Grèce. Menés sous formes d'entretiens non-directifs visant la restitution d'aspects d'une mémoire autobiographique dans laquelle il serait également question de l'impact des évènements des années 40 dans la vie des acteurs, ces interviews ont permis que chaque sujet se saisisse différemment du dispositif proposé pour raconter son histoire. Face à la caméra, devant une interlocutrice bienveillante, formée à la psychologie d'orientation psychanalytique et à l'anthropologie sociale, et un interprète tout aussi bienveillant, les personnes interviewées ont été invitées à nous parler de leur histoire et notamment des événements des années 40, mais aussi de tout autre fait marquant pour elles, comme elles l'entendaient.

Dans son témoignage, une dame que nous allons appeler Irina relate la situation asphyxiante dans le Nord de la Grèce pendant la guerre civile (1946-1949). Elle évoque la décision du parti communiste de séparer les enfants de leurs familles (Lagani 1996, Van Boeschoten 2003a et 2003b, Pejoska-Bouchereau 2008) et de les confier à des jeunes filles qui allaient les aider à traverser la frontière yougoslave et décrit son départ avec des enfants macédoniens qu'on lui avait confiés et son arrivée tumultueuse en République de Macédoine. Elle parle aussi de son dévouement face à ses enfants dont elle continuera à s'occuper bien après la fin de sa mission officielle, en devenant responsable dans la structure qui les a accueillis et elle évoquera longuement son affection pour des enfants marqués à tout jamais par la guerre, l'arrachement aux parents et l'exil.

L'expression corporelle sera particulièrement convoquée aux moments où elle évoquera les bombardements de la région par les forces américaines, la peur des enfants et la sienne, le soulagement d'avoir réussi après de nombreuses péripéties à traverser la frontière. L'alternance entre le grec et le macédonien, l'émotion de cette description où elle a pu dire « nous fuyions la mort » en éclatant en sanglots, le rythme haletant de la description rappelant la traversée mouvementée de la frontière ont trouvé un pendant corporel dans les gestes qui ont accompagné son récit, marqués par le désespoir jadis ressenti, la lutte pour la survie en même temps que la confrontation à l'imminence de la mort. L'entendre parler de cette expérience est aussi la revivre un peu avec elle, tant le traumatisme vécu à l'âge de

20 ans reste profond, présent, susceptible de surgir tel quel à n'importe quel moment dans la narration de cette femme octogénaire.

Une autre dame que nous appellerons Ana évoquera dans son témoignage l'arrestation des membres de sa famille et sa propre détention, les tortures subies sur son corps de jeune fille, son transfert depuis son village du Nord de la Grèce vers les prisons centrales d'Athènes, sa vie pendant ses dix années de prison, sa libération vécue comme un arrachement face à la vie communautaire en détention, son arrivée à son village macédonien dévasté par l'armée grecque pendant la guerre civile et sa décision de partir en Yougoslavie « puisqu'il n'y avait plus rien là-bas ».Son témoignage est raconté dans une langue grecque fluide, trace de sa vie en prison avec des codétenues hellénophones à Athènes. Prisonnière politique, détenue autant pour ses idées subversives que pour le combat des membres de sa famille du côté des forces de l'Armée Démocratique, Ana est condamnée à une lourde peine, reliée dans la sévérité de son application à son profil sociologique aussi : issue d'une minorité persécutée, d'un milieu rural éloigné de la capitale, d'une famille aux revenus modestes, elle n'a pas pu bénéficier d'une aide juridique ou d'appuis institutionnels qui auraient pu réduire sa peine. N'ayant pas elle-même combattu, coupable d'avoir apporté de l'aide logistique aux combattants, autrement dit d'avoir donné de la nourriture à ses propres frères engagés dans l'armée, Ana a fait l'objet des violences liées à son identité sexuelle et ethnique. En tant que jeune fille macédonienne, elle a été torturée pendant sa première arrestation dans le Nord de la Grèce. Elle décrit la scène où on l'a dénudée et où on a placé des œufs brulants sous ses aisselles l'obligeant ainsi à ouvrir ses bras et à dévoiler une intimité qu'elle cherchait à cacher. Elle relate cette scène, en imitant par des gestes l'inconfort dans lequel elle était, elle décrit aussi la présence d'autres jeunes filles humiliées de la sorte, elle se réfère également à l'eau glacée par laquelle on l'aspergeait en plein hiver en la laissant greloter dans le froid d'un paysage enneigé.

Ses gestes précis, saccadés viennent dire de manière factuelle les tortures subies là où la narration verbale semble peiner à trouver des mots toujours adéquats. La narration est interrompue par son besoin de prendre un verre d'eau, de nous montrer aussi les photos d'elle-même, jeune fille absolument splendide, comme pour mieux insister sur l'aspect sexiste des violences endurées.

D'autres femmes témoigneront des viols systématiques subis en détention, des pratiques de purification ethnique où des violences sexuelles ont été utilisées comme une arme de guerre, de la difficulté d'être une femme dans une société où l'honneur reposait sur la vertu des femmes et sur la capacité des hommes à la défendre, alors qu'en contexte de guerre, le sentiment partagé était celui de la vulnérabilité la plus totale.

Dans les deux témoignages recueillis que nous avons décidé de présenter de manière succincte en respectant en cela la volonté des personnes filmées, il est apparu que les mouvements du corps venaient accompagner le verbe pour ponctuer, contredire ou compléter le récit. La sidération traumatique rend souvent difficile la création d'une narration cohérente et continue, le propre de l'effraction du trauma étant justement d'incarner une rupture dans l'image de soi et le vécu interne de son rapport au monde. Les deux témoignages que nous avons essayé de contextualiser et de présenter nous relatent de manière singulière deux expériences de traversée de la guerre.

Dans le premier, les aspects labiles du discours, l'expression des affects, la dramatisation de la narration créent une correspondance entre la narration verbale et corporelle, permettant d'explorer la tristesse et le désespoir ressentis face à des pertes et des séparations irréversibles. Dans le second, les aspects plus rigides du discours, l'usage de procédés de rationalisation et d'intellectualisation, l'attachement factuel

aux détails et la mise de côté de l'expression de l'affectivité dévoilent un décalage entre un verbe très mesuré et précautionneux et une expression du corps laissant apparaître par moments le mal-être ressenti.

Les deux narrations ont ainsi illustré deux modalités différentes de traiter psychiquement le traumatisme, donnant lieu à des procédés de discours distincts. La médiation filmique a joué un rôle important dans le dispositif, d'abord en suscitant une certaine appréhension et une légère fascination, puis en incarnant une forme de témoin externe au groupe humain constitué par la chercheuse, l'interprète et la personne interviewée, un tiers qui en appelait à la communauté. Cette référence d'extériorité dans le temps et dans l'espace, cet objet étranger à la situation du groupe par son rattachement à une possible postérité, lors d'une adresse ultérieure à d'autres témoins, a fait qu'à un moment donné la première interlocutrice se soit adressée spécifiquement à la caméra, en nous demandant de filmer des cartes et des photos que les enfants de l'orphelinat lui avaient offertes et dont elle voudrait qu'un souvenir perdure, là où la seconde nous a demandé avec insistance si tel ou tel autre propos était en train d'être enregistré pour nous faire part de son souhait qu'une partie de son récit ne soit pas filmée. Entre peur et désir de montrer, la médiation filmique a occupé une fonction multiple et a participé tant à la création d'un dispositif qu'il importerait de questionner quant à ses effets dans l'après-coup de l'expérience vécue, qu'à la réalisation d'une œuvre testimoniale imprégnée des enjeux psychiques de ce cadre de recueil et de consignation transformatrice de l'oralité des actrices. Dans cet espace, la fonction de médiateur du médium malléable est aussi partagée par la personne qui mène l'entretien et qui accueille les mouvements psychiques des témoins et leur expression verbale et corporelle. Quant à la présence de différents objets (photos, lettres, cartes-postales) qui renvoient à « l'enfant mort » que chacun porte à l'intérieur de soi, il nous semble que leur sollicitation dans le cadre de la création filmique n'est pas sans évoquer le questionnement actuel de Christian Boltanski sur l'image en tant que reconnaissance, transmission et œuvre de dignité (Didi-Huberman 2010).

La relation d'observation et d'écoute établie n'est jamais anodine et ses effets sur les sujets interviewés, sur leurs paroles et leurs actions, constituent un champ de recherche particulièrement fécond pour essayer de comprendre l'impact du chercheur dans l'édification de son objet d'étude et dans l'interprétation de l'attitude et des conduites des acteurs. Dans les deux cas que nous avons étudiés, le rôle de la caméra a été à la fois étayant, rassurant dans sa capacité à restituer une trame narrative continue, et effrayant, susceptible de participer à un dévoilement rappelant le sentiment d'exposition de jadis, face à une intimité mise à mal par la violence sociale et politique exercée à l'encontre de ces femmes macédoniennes.

Notre présence a pu servir également d'étayage dans la mesure où nous avions adopté une écoute bienveillante, en suivant le fil associatif des idées énoncées par les témoins et en nous prêtant au travail de co-construction que constitue une remémoration du passé en présence d'un autre. L'absence de jugement de valeur, l'empathie face aux traumatismes relatés, le désir qu'une mémoire puisse émerger et devenir audible ont certainement participé au travail de reconstruction mémorielle, ne serait-ce qu'en nommant et en identifiant ce qui nous avait semblé relever des points nodaux du récit. Reconnaître la portée des traumatismes subis, énoncer l'importance du témoignage dans son authenticité et voir dans ces personnes des témoins fiables et légitimes est une manière en effet de participer au processus de l'énonciation et de la remémoration testimoniales.

Elaborer, analyser, restituer l'expression du non-verbal

Ces témoignages nous ont convoquée du côté de notre capacité à entendre le traumatisme dans toutes ses formes et à pouvoir à notre tour en faire un objet d'élaboration et d'analyse, puis de restitution de notre réflexion. Il nous semble intéressant de nous pencher sur la manière dont l'évocation de l'expérience traumatique convoque le corps du chercheur. La narrativité verbale et non verbale d'un témoignage de l'extrême fait appel à notre propre manière d'entendre ce récit. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit de le percevoir, de le penser, de le ressentir. Dans un deuxième temps, il s'agit de réussir à comprendre ses effets sur la personne qui se raconte et sur nous-mêmes, auditeurs et spectateurs, placés en position de témoin du témoin. Enfin, il est question de rendre quelque chose de cette écoute créée dans l'interaction verbale et non verbale à un tiers, le lecteur du texte, le spectateur d'un documentaire, le public d'un colloque.

La première étape relève de la perception d'une expression qui convoque de manière simultanée ou décalée dans le temps notre capacité à penser autant que notre faculté de ressentir sur le plan émotionnel et sur le plan corporel. Quand nous avons recueilli les témoignages de ces femmes macédoniennes, nous les avons écoutées dans un partage empathique de leurs affects face à ce qu'avait été leur détresse. Nous avons mobilisé également notre capacité d'élaboration mentale, pour essayer de comprendre comment ces violences avaient été traversées par les personnes concernées.

Il est important de voir quelles sont les ressources internes de chacune des personnes impliquées, ses angoisses et ses mécanismes de défense. Il importe aussi de comprendre l'articulation de l'histoire de chacune de ces jeunes filles à l'histoire familiale et aux transmissions opérées au sein de leurs groupes d'appartenances. Il s'agit alors de voir comment ces expériences individuelles s'inscrivent dans une histoire subjective de chacune d'elles et dans un parcours communautaire de plusieurs personnes persécutées pour des motifs identiques dans le contexte de la guerre civile ou dans des circonstances similaires de persécutions ethniques, de violences faites aux femmes, des discriminations politiques. Dans notre cas de figure, les deux femmes que nous avons décidé de présenter ont été toutes les deux dans des positions de leadership assez peu compatibles avec les rôles habituels des femmes dans la société grecque des années 40 bien qu'imprégnées dans leurs missions respectives d'une culture du « care » ou « soin des autres », traditionnellement allouée aux femmes. L'une a été propulsée au rang de responsable d'un groupe d'enfants, investie de la mission de leur faire traverser la frontière alors bombardée. L'autre a été considérée par le tribunal à tort comme une combattante de l'Armée Démocratique, l'aide logistique apportée aux combattants étant considérée comme une participation active à l'effort de guerre et a été condamnée pour ce motif à une lourde peine de prison, signe d'appartenance à un poste important dans la rébellion. Toutes les deux ont eu des responsabilités bien supérieures à celles des femmes en temps de paix et en même temps toutes les deux ont été assignées à des tâches relatives au soutien des autres. Leurs récits de vie ont laissé entendre toute la pluralité des positionnements internes, leurs angoisses et leurs peurs les plus profondes. Le film montre aussi que ces responsabilités ont été vécues comme une chance d'émancipation malgré l'horreur des persécutions subies. Enfin, tous les deux récits nous ont beaucoup touchée et cet article autant que transformation d'une expérience d'oralité en travail d'écriture vient restituer les effets psychiques de cette rencontre intersubjective.

La deuxième étape consiste à entendre chacun de ces témoignages, qui convoque comme nous l'avons vu le chercheur en tant que réalité extérieure à soi, également

comme une réalité intérieure, autrement dit comme un objet psychique, ayant des effets sur soi-même et sur l'autre. Les effets de la narration verbale et non verbale sont très nombreux, puisque chaque récit nous reconnecte à nos propres traumatismes, à notre capacité à accueillir dans leur unicité ceux des autres et à notre faculté à retrouver ce qu'il y a d'universel dans chaque parcours singulier. C'est à ce moment-là que notre corps peut devenir une caisse de résonnance de ce que l'autre a éprouvé et qui n'a pas pu être élaboré, entendu, métabolisé. Tout un travail de transformation de la charge traumatique est nécessaire pour pouvoir mettre des mots sur des ressentis du côté du vide, de la sidération, de l'irreprésentable ou de l'indicible. Restituer ce vécu est aussi l'explorer, le comprendre, se l'approprier.

Pour la dernière étape qu'est la restitution du non verbal, le travail de réécriture du témoignage oral est aussi fonction des moyens dont on dispose. Transcrire un texte, monter un film, préparer une intervention pour un colloque sont différentes modalités de présenter ce que nous avons saisi de notre rencontre à l'autre, à travers des moyens d'écriture qui ne sont pas les mêmes chaque fois et qui permettent de convoquer plus ou moins directement le discours direct de la personne, accompagné de son image, de sa voix, de ses mouvements. Par son isomorphie avec les conditions de l'interaction sur le terrain, le film documentaire nous semble le moyen le plus propice de reconstituer la situation d'énonciation, là où le travail d'écriture nous paraît demander un travail d'interprétation bien plus poussé pour tenter de rendre par écrit ce qui a pu se jouer dans le lien à l'oral et au corporel. Or, le montage du film implique aussi une sélection, une mise en récit qui exclut certaines images, certains moments de flottement ou d'imperfection technique, et constitue de fait un travail d'interprétation ou de réécriture. Enfin, la présentation des témoignages dans un travail universitaire, oral ou écrit, présuppose aussi une transformation des données initiales, par réduction du corpus, par sélection de certains aspects jugés saillants, par interprétation de ces éléments à l'aune de son angle épistémologique ou méthodologique, voir même en référence à sa propre subjectivité. La thématisation d'un sujet de recherche est toujours le produit d'un intérêt singulier du chercheur pour cette question. Et il reste toujours une partie non élaborée, des points aveugles d'une histoire. Dans notre cas de figure, c'est en revoyant le film que nous avons réalisé qu'il y avait des questions essentielles qui n'avaient pas été posées, des moments où nous n'avions pas su saisir les perches tendues. Des effets de pudeur ont pu nous empêcher de questionner davantage certains aspects de la corporéité des personnes interviewées et dans ce sens, l'écriture de ce texte peut être pensée comme une élaboration du retour du refoulé.

En essayant d'aller plus loin dans les motivations profondes de ce travail d'écriture mais aussi du terrain qui l'avait précédé, on identifie un intérêt plus singulier pour la réflexion de ceux qui se trouvent en position de discrimination multiple, en raison de leur appartenance à divers groupes marginalisés. Si nous avons décidé de parler des témoignages des femmes macédoniennes issues des zones rurales du nord de la Grèce, des violences faites à des personnes dans un contexte de guerre civile, en relation avec leur identité ethnique, culturelle, sexuelle et en référence à leur milieu socioéconomique, c'est que cette question nous semble engager une réflexion sur l'intersectionnalité importante à mener. Or, ce regard qui s'intéresse aux discriminations multiples opérées à l'encontre des personnes minorisées du fait de leurs appartenances individuelles et groupales, relève aussi d'un point de vue subjectif.

La subjectivité du chercheur est convoquée aux trois étapes précédemment décrites, à savoir lors de la collecte du témoignage, pendant son élaboration mentale et au moment de la restitution du produit de sa propre réflexion.

Conclusion

L'expression corporelle permet de mettre en évidence des aspects de son vécu que le seul verbe n'arrive pas à restituer. Complémentaire à l'égard d'une expression verbale, qu'elle sert souvent à accompagner, l'expression corporelle est aussi un langage parallèle, permettant d'explorer la région du non-dit, de ce qui a été éprouvé mais pas suffisamment élaboré, de sensations qui sont restées intactes à travers le temps et qui viennent représenter dans une performance testimoniale la vivacité du traumatisme.

Dans le cas des femmes macédoniennes dont nous avons pu recueillir les témoignages, cette expression a été particulièrement marquée par des violences spécifiques, reliées à leur statut de jeunes filles, privées de parole publique et porteuses d'un corps individuel mais aussi social, en tant que dépositaires d'une perception de l'honneur familial. Dans leur prise de parole, ces femmes ont pu s'exprimer dans différentes langues et mobilisé leur expression corporelle pour livrer un regard singulier sur leur expérience passée. Elles ont aussi pu laisser apparaître le poids des déterminismes socioculturels dans leurs destinées singulières. C'est en tant que membres d'une population minorisée et discriminée, en tant que personnes suspectées d'être des porteuses possibles d'une idéologie jugée subversive et en tant que jeunes filles dans un contexte de violences accrues à l'égard des femmes, qu'elles ont subi dans leur corps différentes formes de discrimination et de violation de leurs droits fondamentaux.

L'évocation de leur récit convoque différents niveaux d'écoute, depuis la perception sensorielle et le ressenti émotionnel jusqu'à l'élaboration mentale et le travail psychique nécessaire à la métabolisation de la charge traumatique du récit (Golse 1999). La restitution de ce travail engage alors une réflexion plus générale sur les moyens et les modalités d'un partage du langage non verbal avec différents types d'interlocuteurs, dans divers cadres de réalisation (Tisseron 2006).

Enfin se rendre témoin de ses témoignages exige un positionnement éthique et déontologique quant à la manière de restituer l'expression de personnes victimes de comportements inhumains et dégradants dans ses versants singuliers, particuliers et universels. Dans les cas que nous avons exposés la singularité du parcours de chacune de ces deux femmes et les particularités de leur groupe d'appartenance, une population minorisée et persécutée, rejoignent ainsi une réflexion possible sur l'universalité des violences faites sur les corps des opposants politiques en contexte de guerre, de guerre civile ou de dictature. (Danforth, Van Boeschoten 2012). Notre expérience clinique auprès de victimes de toute formes de persécution nous a appris que la violence politique s'exerce d'abord sur le corps de la personne. Se sentir dépossédé de son corps est la matrice de toute autre forme d'aliénation.

La narration de soi peut être en soi thérapeutique pour peu que le dispositif d'accueil de cette parole s'y prête. La médiation filmique peut participer à un travail de transformation psychique et sociale de l'expérience indicible, en réalité partageable et en témoignage audible et visible. Le support filmique contribue ainsi à acter et à authentifier l'expression orale, à lui attribuer un corps animé et vivant, à passer d'une situation de sidération traumatique à une possibilité de se positionner en sujet.

NOTE

1. *Apud* le site : http://theses.univ-lyon2.fr/documents/getpart.php?id=lyon2.2010.rey_b&part=368267, qui cite René Roussillon. 1991. « Un paradoxe de la représentation : le médium malléable et la pulsion d'emprise ». Dans Roussilion, R., *Paradoxes et situations limites de la psychanalyse*, 130-146. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France : « Revenons un instant sur les cinq caractéristiques principales qui définissent le médium malléable. [...]: l'indestructibilité, l'extrême sensibilité, l'indéfinie transformation, l'inconditionnelle disponibilité et enfin l'animation propre. Ces caractéristiques peuvent être décrites séparément, mais leur rapport d'interdépendance les unes par rapport aux autres est essentiel pour que le médium malléable prenne toute sa valeur. » (para. 19). « Bien qu'en lui-même le médium malléable soit une substance inanimée, il est nécessaire que le sujet puisse le considérer à un moment ou à un autre comme une substance vivante, animée. Toutes ces caractéristiques paraissent jouer comme des atténuateurs des angoisses de séparation et de différenciation, conjointement aux différentes défenses que le sujet peut lui-même instaurer pour lutter contre ces mêmes angoisses. Le concept de malléabilité s'inscrit donc dans une réflexion sur la séparabilité de l'objet. » (para. 23-25).

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4

The Handwritten Recipe Notebook as a *Place of Memory*

Laura Jiga Iliescu
"Constantin Brăiloiu" Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, Romanian Academy, Romania

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ABSTRACT

A handwritten recipe notebook is not a mere domestic collection of recipes, but a material support for an immaterial tradition that combines culinary knowledge with commensality practices. These are formalized texts (a title, a list of ingredients, and directions) activated through the oral *performance* of a formalized setting (the food preparation process), which combines sequences of gestures instead of (or together with) words, or/and through a writing activity (copying a model or transcribing the recipe after dictation). The final material artefact (namely the dish and the written recipe) incorporates the syncretic and immaterial memories of all previous performances. A recipe notebook is not a simple anthology of texts either, it is instead a subjective "critical edition" which grows page by page, according to imperceptible selection criteria; with the passing of time, the pages become impregnated with smells, traces of pots of oil or sugar, children's fingerprints, figurative drawings, etc.

KEYWORDS

Cooking; performance; informal knowledge; handwritten notebook; memory.

This article concerns only tangentially the broad field of food. The focus will be on the handwritten recipe notebook as an arena for interferences between orality and literacy; these interferences articulate the texts with their paratextual uses, some of which explicitly included in the very body of the recipes (the directions), some other autonomously developed from them. Secondly, the very structure, configuration, use, and meanings of such a notebook go beyond its direct primary purpose, i.e., cooking directions, turning it into a multileveled cultural product. According to Gonzáles Turmo:

> Recipe books are extremely generous documents. They provide information about the lives of their authors, about their culinary interests and practices, and, by allusion, about numerous other topics: production and the local and regional markets, harvests, hunting and fishing practices in the area, wealth distribution, relationships between men and women, celebrations, communications with other peoples and regions, etc. (2004: 9).

They indirectly also provide information about the time, the space, and the occasion for preparing one or another dish; about daily and (mostly) festive meals; about highly demanded ingredients and the strategies for getting them; about social networks and even about different political contexts. In other words, they create and transmit the memory of different hypostases of the food culture and document "aspects of domestic practices history" (Rees 2017), which include the dynamic relation between orality and literacy.

When the practice of creating cooking notebooks for domestic use began in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was the domain of the upper classes of Europe's early modern literate culture; these notebooks could be found in the houses of educated and rich families, and in the monasteries too. The practice of copying, writing, and reading such texts proliferated and became popular when "the wives of middle-class households began to read and write" and, consequently, became interested to turn "the table into a place of social status" (Gonzáles Turmo 2004: 9–10) and prestige. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this practice also appeared in the urban semiliterate milieus and among the rural elites, as part of the modern emancipation process. Very soon, the manuscript recipe collections were joined by printed editions, which, however, did not replace the tradition of handwritten cooking notebooks probably because of their flexible structure which encapsulated a personal identity shaped within the domestic and predominantly feminine sphere of the kitchen.

Handwritten cooking recipes is a category of texts which are activated only through oral *performances*.[1] Thus, mirroring the folklore principle of variability, they are not static artefacts, but variable forms simultaneously created and transmitted as they are put into practice. There can be identified two levels of cooking recipe performances, which lead to different but interrelated products: the handwriting activities, on the one hand, and the food preparation process, which articulates gestural structures instead of (or together with) spoken words, on the other hand. They both require specific formal and informal knowledge. In the end, the integral recipe consists of a series of tangible artefacts (the successive versions of one and the same copied recipe and the prepared dishes) doubled by an immaterial component (the cooking process and its performance contexts).

Writing the "Text" and Its Models

There are three distinct writing activities that lead to a recipe text: (1) transcribing it after dictation; (2) copying out an existing written recipe; and (3) transcribing from memory a previous cooking experience. All of them assume different manners of a model involvement.

The process of dictation involves the presence of another person who is sharing her/his memories in a more or less formalized form. Transcribing is not an automatic reproduction of words, but a conversion in graphic and figurative forms (abbreviations, page layout), the creative interpretation of new information in relation with the writer's cooking practice (retroactive cognition) in order to later prepare the dish (projective cognition).

The process of hand-copying does not require fidelity to the source either, as the latter can be enhanced with comments, additional information, or abbreviated. There results an altered variant of the model that presumptively will be copied out by other hands and join a series of written versions whose accumulation will eventually lead to a corpus of versions, which share the same referent (namely a certain dish recipe) successively created by different scribes, in different contexts. This entire process can be described through what folklorists call the variable, syncretic, collective, and anonymous characteristics of folklore, as revealed only during a formalized performance event (here the very writing situation). "In these books the style changes from one recipe to the next, depending on who dictated it or where it was copied from, and infinitives alternate freely with the first or third person" (González Turmo 2004: 13).

On the contrary, writing from memory activates an immaterial model, namely a previous cooking event that will be transposed and externalized into words. Before that, the very recipe had not actually

existed as a verbal structure. Memory plays a fundamental role, being organized by mental images "and units of meaning rather than by verbal expressions" (Honko 1996: 5). Taking the concept of "mental text," as theorized by Lauri Honko in relation to the singer of epic songs, and replacing the verbal performance with a gestural performance, we may speak about a pre-narrative model externalized both through further performances and through the act of creating, from memory, a written recipe.

> To be able to understand the production of text in actual performance it seems necessary to postulate a kind of "pre-narrative," a pre-textual frame, that is and organized collection of relevant conscious and unconscious material present in the singer's mind. This material consists of (1) textual elements and (2) generic rules for reproduction: we may call it a "mental text" (Honko 1996: 4).

Unlike the clear narrative structure of an oral epic performance Lauri Honko referred to, in the case of a recipe for a dish, the narrative mostly consists of the organized chain of sequences. But more than this, we have to take into consideration the fact that the conventionalized structure of a recipe—title, list of ingredients, and instructions on how to combine them—was imposed after 1877, when *The Boston Cookbook* was published (Cotter 1997: 59). Previously, "the ingredients would not necessarily be listed separately but mentioned as they became relevant within the narrative" (Cotter 1997: 59), as an implicit *memorata*, abstracted by a title and functionally oriented to a coda.

Once written down, the recipe will work as a fixed, still adjustable model for the further events that actuate it. Through the act of cooking, the text turns into one of its many oral, immaterial hypostases which, instead of words, are expressed and composed of gestural sequences that follow a stable—but not identically replicated—structure. Inside a scenario that produces an artefact, the movement of the body is a manifest text that uses gestures (cutting, peeling, blending, washing, moving between the working places of the kitchen, making the fire, checking the oven, etc.) as part of a specific and syncretic language. Each type of artefact (here a certain dish) is the result of successive motion sequences organized into characteristic structures. "Structure and performance are understood as mutually constitutive" (Keller and Keller 1996: 27). In this regard, performing a gesture represents the kinetic expression of a segment of knowledge required by the very process of turning the raw material, the ingredients, into food. Making a dish entails three necessary phases: (1) activating and selecting knowledge, (2) transposing knowledge into gestures whose sum results in (3) the final product. Displayed and consumed, the prepared dish represents a material version of the handwritten recipe and of the mental models represented by its previous preparation events. Both cooking and writing the recipe can be described as part of a fluid and flexible process of oral-written creation and transmission formalized structures in variable forms.

Formal and Informal Transmission of Knowledge

The cook's skills become visible only while she/he is at work (not while reading the recipe!), using fire, water, ingredients, own body and, not least, selecting the appropriate utensils. All these activities require a rich repertoire of informal knowledge that is not explicitly exposed through the written recipe. In its older format, a recipe did not offer the exact details of ingredient amounts according to universal measurement standards of grams or litters, but very subjective indications, such as "a handful of flour," "an egg-size knob of butter," "a pinch of salt," or, much more

personalized, "just eye the amount of water," "add salt/sugar to taste." Nor is temperature precisely measured in degrees, but in colour and consistency, smell, sounds, and other corporeal sensations: "the oven is hot enough when you can keep your hand inside it as long as it takes to say Our Lord" (this might as well be a ritual indication) or "until you count to three"; the time is *appreciated* by smell and aspect: "let the onion heat until it dances" or "cook the meat until well browned," etc. Sensory stimuli involved in the cooking process have instrumental function and work as cognitive tools "that can refer to words and other intangibles as appropriately as to material objects"; hence, cooking "provides an activity in which the tools themselves are easily identifiable and the practices incorporating them easily observed" (Keller and Keller 1996: 20). Both cognitive and linguistic tools appeal to the memory of previous performance events and simultaneously activate a certain knowledge acquired through the concrete cooking experience as an apprentice and/or individual. For example, you have to know by your own senses what the expression "the onion dances" means–how it smells, what it looks like—and also to be familiar with the specific use of the cooking jargon acquired through interactive communication and performance: without the oral component of experience, the written recipe is not complete, as in the case of any informal learning of a craft which involves direct contact with matter, and sometimes accidents too.

The Recipe Handwritten Notebook as a *Codex*

The handwritten recipe notebook is not a mere anthology of culinary texts, it is instead a subjective "critical edition" of a cumulative corpus classified according to the owner(s)' personal taste, the family's or friends' preferences, or the cost of certain ingredients, etc. An illustration of this fact is the widespread habit of attaching adjectives such as "tasty" or "cheap" to the recipe's title.

The recipe collection results from random additions, page by page, of new cooking instructions or copies of those texts which, due to wear, were damaged and became illegible. Together with the food recipes, between the notebook's covers there can be found accounts and descriptions of different kinds of feminine activities, such as needlework and sewing patterns, all sort of practical tips, diets, gardening techniques, etc., which make these miscellanies qualify as an interesting subcategory of the manuscript domestic almanacs. Between the bounded pages of a recipe notebook, freestanding sheets of different sizes, written by the owner's hand, by family members or friends are inserted. The positions of these pieces of paper are interchangeable, as long as they are taken out from the notebook, used on different occasions, and then put back randomly between the covers. The result is a fluid structure, continuously redesigned into what might be called a *recipe box* that consists of an intertextual corpus in which all texts are related without having however a fixed position in the "anthology." We may speak of a veritable *opera aperta* (using Umberto Eco's term) which is reconfigured each time it is performed by different hands, an open work that creates and transmits the memory of a family, as well as a cultural hypostasis that reflects the dynamic relation between orality and literacy. Even if the handwritten recipe notebook has an owner, it also has more than one author.

The "Blue Cover" Recipe Notebook

For the final part of the essay I will briefly present a case study which illustrates some of the ideas exposed above and might also

open up new paths for further investigations. It is about my mother's recipe notebook. The following account and comments combine etic observations with personal memories, as part of the very context in which the notebook was created and "performed." I assume a certain subjectivity as a characteristic of this genre type of oral-written cultural objects.

The original paper support is an A5 48-page line-ruled notebook with plastic blue covers. This is why in our family parlance it was called the *blue cover notebook*. In time its thickness increased with more than 60 freestanding pieces of paper of different sizes, some handwritten or even detached from printed cooking almanacs. The collection, which assembles over 170 recipes (including variants of one and the same dish) together with other practical tips, remains open since new recipes can be still inserted among the notebook pages.

The owner of the blue cover recipe box was my mother (she was born in 1942 and worked as a teacher). Still, other hands contributed to it (including my own, with the calligraphy specific to my different ages), either adding a new recipe, or—reserved to family members—making marginal comments and suggestions to the texts that already figured in the collection. In doing so, we have spontaneously recreated one of the main characteristics of the early modern manuscript tradition of the so-called popular book: the written page works as an arena for interactive communication between the scribe and his/her readers, who often have familiar faces.

Some texts mention the name of the recipe's source—not of its inventor, but of the person from whom the recipe was learned or copied out, thus entering the culinary and social repertoire of my family. The dish itself is anonymous, but each version of its recipe gets an author. The phenomenon is similar to the traditional folk transmission of formalized oral narratives meant for a large audience (e.g., epic songs, fairy tales): a certain piece is attributed by the community to a certain singer or storyteller whose name is well-known in his/her area, but who becomes anonymous as the distance increases; nor is his/her authorship over that piece recognized on a larger scale, since there are other persons who perform it too, in different variants. For example, in the 1990s, at least in my birth town, one of the famous cakes was known under the name "The TV" [RO. *Televizor*]: no one knows neither who named it like that, nor who baked it for the first time. But in my mother's recipe box it is called "TV Rodica," pointing to the specific manner in which Rodica prepared the cake; in fact, the very recipe stored between the blue covers was written by Rodica's hand. I know who Rodica is but to a stranger's eyes she remains anonymous. Secondly, Rodica is not the original author of the recipe for "The TV" cake, but one of its colporteurs. We have here a fluid chain of transmission of formalized knowledge; consequently, the practice of sharing recipes turns a personal experience into a social one.

Between the blue covers there were inserted, as an autonomous corpus, six A4 line-ruled stapled sheets entitled "Recipes from Mrs. Feştilă" [RO: *Reţete de la doamna Feştilă*], with their own history. In the 1980s, my mother met this lady at a summer training school for teachers where, in the evenings (meaning leisure time) she copied out (and probably discussed) the recipes given by her colleague. This means that Mrs. Feştilă had brought her own handwritten recipe notebook in the luggage to share her recipes not only in their spoken forms, but together with their very material support and formalized structure, and, eventually, to get new recipes in exchange, ready to be written down on blank files. We identify here the feminine urban practice of exchanging recipes (and prestige too) outside the kitchen area. Among the members of our family, Mrs. Feştilă's real identity has become blurred in time, being replaced with a semi-legendary, almost anonymous profile of a lady with

authority over complex festive dishes whose preparation required both time and ingredients difficult to come by during those years of food shortage in Romania. Having made great efforts to obtain those ingredients, my mother succeeded to construct "exotic" (and "western") dinners that she offered and displayed to my parents' friends. Inevitably, someone would ask for the recipe for one of the dishes ("How did you *make* this?") and the six A4 stapled paper sheets would appear on the table, ready to be copied out and orally (and collectively) commented on (especially by the women) around the table, which suddenly turned into a specialized arena for culinary communication by means of words, smells, colours, eating, and drinking events. Nowadays, Mrs. Feştilă's recipes are no longer used neither by my mother nor by her daughters, having thus entered the passive repertoire of our family culinary habits; however, the six stapled papers are still active as part of family's palpable domestic heritage and memory.[2]

Handwritten recipe notebooks work as "tangible artifacts of past lives lived that we can often trace back directly to our immediate or distant relatives offering a historical window perhaps even into dishes and remedies we still use today or fondly remember from childhood" (Rees 2017).

Instead of Conclusions

Browsing a handwritten recipe notebook, the gastronomic and memorial successive stages of the horizon of a family and of the invisible community it belonged to are revealed through recipes, comments, names, children's drawings, fingerprint traces, a dried rose petal, faded almost invisible drops of oil or caramelized sugar. This is a palimpsest of souvenirs, a small *place of memory* as defined by Pierre Nora: "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or by the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (1996: XVII).

NOTES

1. In this regard, the cooking recipe presents interesting similarities with another genre of written/oral tradition, namely the charm, whose performance aims to activate the very power of words and of gestures.

2. As Eleonora Sava pointed out, being transmitted intergenerationally, "these handwritten recipe notebooks include (…) the level of the family memory" (2022: 426).

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Une oralité fonctionnelle à l'ère du numérique : le cas d'Olympos (Karpathos, Grèce)

[A Case of Functional Orality in the Digital Age: Olympos (Karpathos, Greece)]

Mélanie Nittis
Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, France
melanie.nittis@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The cultural life of Olympos, a village on the island of Karpathos in Greece, is organized around sung poetic improvisation. From the time when a majority of the villagers were illiterate to the present, this ritual performance has shifted without changing its nature from "primary orality" to "mixed orality," which coexists today with "mediated orality," and is characterized by three main types of transmission. First, this performance is still being transmitted via oral memory since men are able to remember improvised couplets, in particular so as to avoid singing and hearing the same couplet twice. However, it is mainly the women attending the performances who memorize verses, which they can later play back, thus acting like an oral archive. Next, a written memory has developed in addition to this oral memory because some of the women have recorded the memorized verses in notebooks. Further, the emergence of local newspapers has led women to publish couplets in the community life sections. Under their influence, men also began to publish verses in these newspapers, but especially via the new media. Finally, recording technologies have made it possible to broadcast performances without losing their oral dimension. As a result, many recordings made by the villagers are exchanged via social media or broadcast on local digital radios to make them available to Greek emigrants, and in the process become archived. Despite the discrete presence of writing, Olympos oral poetry therefore remains rooted in Olympos's social life as the community continues to perceive it as a functional form.

KEYWORDS

Orality; sung poetic improvisation; memory; transmission; digital age.

Introduction

Le village d'Olympos se situe en Grèce au nord de l'île de Karpathos. Celle-ci se trouve dans l'archipel du Dodécanèse, en mer Égée. Construit à 300 mètres d'altitude près du sommet montagneux dont il a pris le nom, ce village a longtemps vécu en autarcie du fait de son accès difficile par des étroits sentiers. Les travaux d'ouverture d'une route entre Olympos et Spoa – village situé à 18 km au sud d'Olympos et relié au reste de l'île par la route – pour désenclaver le village, ont été décidés en 1978, mais achevés seulement en 2015.

La pratique poétique et musicale à Olympos – qui peut également s'accompagner de danse dans certains cas – s'exprime essentiellement au cours de moments festifs que l'on nomme localement *glenti*. Ce mot, d'origine turque, signifie littéralement « divertissement » et il est employé couramment en Grèce pour désigner une fête entre amis où l'on partage nourriture, boisson, mais aussi musique. À Olympos, le *glenti* est bien plus qu'un simple moment

Figure 1 : Le village d'Olympos ; mai 2013. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

de réjouissance entre amis car il revêt un caractère sérieux, qu'il se déroule ou non en marge de célébrations religieuses, lesquelles rythment la vie du village. Au cours de ce *glenti*, l'improvisation poétique chantée constitue l'événement principal de la rencontre et représente un élément fondamental pour la communauté du village, dont une majeure partie de ses membres vit actuellement en émigration, mais revient régulièrement célébrer les fêtes dans le village. Cette improvisation poétique chantée relève de ce que l'on appelle « performance », dans le sens où l'entend Paul Zumthor, à savoir « l'action complexe par laquelle un message poétique est simultanément transmis et perçu, ici et maintenant » (Zumthor 1983 : 32). De part ses caractéristiques, il s'agit par ailleurs de l'expression d'« une oralité *primaire* et immédiate, ou *pure*, sans contact avec l'"écriture" [autrement dit] tout système visuel de symbolisation exactement codée et traductible en langue » (Zumthor 1983 : 36). Cette oralité devient par la suite une « oralité mixte », lorsque l'écriture entre en jeu à côté de l'improvisation orale, puis elle en arrive à coexister avec une « oralité médiatisée », au moment où se développent les enregistrements audiovisuels et leur diffusion.

Cette oralité est centrale dans la culture du village d'Olympos car elle au cœur de la performance du *glenti* et de l'improvisation poétique chantée. Elle permet d'entretenir les relations sociales de la communauté et renforce les liens de parenté malgré la dispersion des Olympiotes qui vivent majoritairement expatriés. L'oralité reste présente dans l'écriture de la poésie improvisée qui sert à la fois de mémoire et de moyen d'échanges entre les expatriés. Enfin, cette oralité se conçoit comme un marqueur identitaire et elle permet de préserver le lien qu'entretiennent les Olympiotes avec leur village d'origine.

Afin de mieux comprendre les enjeux de cette performance et la fonction de l'oralité, il est nécessaire de réaliser d'abord une brève présentation de l'improvisation poétique chantée, telle qu'elle est pratiquée aujourd'hui. Les données sur lesquelles je m'appuie sont principalement issues d'observations que j'ai réalisées au cours de plusieurs enquêtes de terrain. Celles-ci se sont déroulées entre mai 2013 et avril 2019, au moment de la fête de Pâques (entre avril et mai selon les années), des fêtes estivales (fêtes patronales en juillet, Dormition de la Vierge et Décollation de saint Jean-Baptiste en août), ou encore en octobre au moment de la fête Nationale grecque.

Présentation synthétique de l'improvisation poétique chantée

Le rôle des instruments

Tout d'abord, l'improvisation poétique chantée est toujours accompagnée par les instruments qui jouent en continu les airs sur lesquels les chanteurs improvisent, afin de les soutenir et de les inciter à chanter. Trois instruments, fabriqués artisanalement sur l'île par les musiciens eux-mêmes en général, sont employés à Olympos. Deux instruments assurent la partie mélodique de l'accompagnement en enchaînant les airs sur lesquels les chanteurs improvisent. D'une part, il y a la cornemuse nommée localement *tsampouna*, qui n'est pas toujours présente pour l'improvisation poétique, en grande partie parce qu'elle a une forte puissance sonore et qu'il est difficile pour un chanteur de rivaliser avec elle sur le plan sonore. D'autre part, se trouve la vièle – ou luth à archet – appelée *lyra*. En plus de sa fonction mélodique, la *lyra* a également une fonction rythmique, laquelle est assurée par les grelots fixés sur l'archet et qui tintent à chaque coup d'archet en marquant le rythme. Lorsqu'elle joue avec la cornemuse, la *lyra* se retrouve au second plan et suit les variations mélodiques et les enchaînements d'airs insufflés par la cornemuse. Enfin, le luth à cordes pincées que l'on nomme *laouto*, instrument introduit plus récemment dans le village durant l'entre-deux guerres, assure un accompagnement rythmique marqué par les coups de plectre, mais également un accompagnement harmonique car il joue des accords modaux. Cette formation *lyra-laouto-tsampouna* n'est pas spécifique à Olympos, puisqu'elle se retrouve dans les autres villages de l'île. Cependant, l'usage de

Figure 2 : La cornemuse *tsampouna*, village d'Olympos ; avril 2014. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

Figure 3 : La vièle *lyra*, village d'Olympos ; avril 2014. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

Figure 4 : Le luth *laouto*, village d'Olympos ; avril 2014. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

la cornemuse se fait de plus en plus rare en dehors du village d'Olympos qui comporte actuellement la majorité des musiciens jouant de cet instrument.

Les instrumentistes sont toujours disposés face à face en formant un cercle fermé car cela leur permet de mieux s'entendre, de mieux ressentir l'énergie issue du jeu des instruments qui circule à travers la musique, mais aussi de pouvoir suivre plus facilement les variations et improvisations que le musicien crée en jouant les mélodies. Cette disposition primordiale m'a été rapportée en ces termes par Giorgos Giorgakis, qui exprime ce qu'il ressent lorsqu'il joue de la cornemuse :

> La *lyra* qui est en face de la *tsampouna* joue un rôle… joue un rôle à la fois acoustique et visuel. C'est-à-dire que moi j'écoute ce que je joue en ayant la *lyra* en face de moi. Le son frappe sur la *lyra* et revient ainsi encore mieux à mes oreilles. […] Ainsi nous avons un contact direct. Nous ne sommes pas disposés en ligne parce qu'en ligne nous perdons le contact visuel et acoustique. En cercle nous avons un plein contact[1].

Par ailleurs, cette importance du corps dans l'exécution de la musique est amplifiée par le fait que les instrumentistes marquent très souvent le tempo en tapant du pied sur le sol ou sur la table sur laquelle il arrive fréquemment qu'ils soient disposés, afin que les chanteurs les entendent et les voient.

Figure 5 : La disposition des instruments dans le *glenti*, village d'Olympos ; mai 2013. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

Les caractéristiques de l'improvisation

L'improvisation poétique chantée se présente sous forme de distiques que l'on appelle *mantinades* – au singulier *mantinada*, terme provenant du vénitien et signifiant littéralement « aubade » – et qui respectent certaines caractéristiques. Les distiques, chantés en dialecte local, sont des vers iambiques de quinze syllabes avec une césure à l'hémistiche. Le premier hémistiche compte huit syllabes et le second sept. Le rythme iambique[2] du vers est donné par la présence des syllabes accentuées des mots qui doivent principalement être sur des syllabes paires et il y a par ailleurs deux accents obligatoires, l'un sur la 6e ou 8e syllabe et l'autre, sur la 14e syllabe. Il faut noter également que les deux vers du distique sont toujours assonancés voire, dans certains cas, rimés[3]. Les thèmes développés sont variés – intercession aux saints, émigration, vie quotidienne du village, évocation des morts, remerciements, reproches, élections, nostalgie – mais se rattachent tous, de près ou de loin, à la communauté et à son village.

Ces *mantinades* constituent la plus grande partie du *glenti* parce qu'« à travers elles, le chanteur a l'occasion d'exprimer de manière réfléchie, immédiate et "poétique" chacune de ses pensées et chacun de ses sentiments[4] » (Makris 2007 : 62). Les *mantinades* sont présentes également dans les autres villages de l'île de Karpathos et dans les îles de Kalymnos ou en Crète, mais comme me l'a expliqué un musicien crétois, la quintessence de leur production est à Olympos où les chanteurs-poètes préservent l'improvisation et la forme rituelle de la performance.

L'improvisation est réalisée par un soliste, hémistiche par hémistiche et il y a une reprise immédiate par le chœur, constitué par les autres hommes présents, sauf au dernier hémistiche. Par ailleurs, on compte de nombreuses césures et répétitions, ainsi

que l'emploi d'interjections pour adapter le texte à la musique. Pour chaque air, les modalités d'adaptation du vers à la mélodie sont différentes et certains airs se voient adjoindre également un refrain constitué par des vers non improvisés et issus de chansons de la tradition orale, lesquels vers s'intercalent entre les deux vers du distique. Chaque homme qui prend la parole pour improviser annonce son intervention en chantant, sur une ou deux notes longues, une interjection assurant une fonction phatique. L'improvisation est certes individuelle, mais elle nécessite un contexte collectif pour s'exprimer pleinement, d'autant que tous les distiques improvisés tour à tour par les hommes forment une suite. Les distiques se répondent ainsi les uns aux autres en créant un dialogue autour d'une thématique.

L'importance du contexte

Cette nécessaire collectivité s'explique notamment par le fait que l'improvisation chantée ne peut avoir lieu sans la présence d'instruments qui assurent l'accompagnement et dynamisent, à travers le jeu personnel des instrumentistes, l'entrain des chanteurs, mais également par le rôle que jouent les hommes lorsqu'ils n'improvisent pas. En effet, la structure même que prend l'improvisation d'un distique requiert la présence d'un chœur pour assurer les reprises après chaque hémistiche. Cela soutient le chanteur soliste improvisateur qui profite de ces reprises pour penser à la suite de son improvisation.

Par ailleurs, parmi ces hommes formant le « collectif », il est primordial pour chaque poète improvisateur d'être en présence de sa *parea*, autrement dit un groupe d'hommes qui sont des amis et avec lesquels il a l'habitude de participer à un *glenti*. La présence de la *parea* a un effet stimulateur et permet de générer le *kefi*, sorte de disposition physique et psychique qui « renvoie à une forme élevée d'expérience qui se manifeste elle-même dans un comportement discipliné et formalisé[5] » (Caraveli 1985 : 23). À la présence de la *parea* et à l'émergence du *kefi* vient s'ajouter un autre élément permettant la stimulation de l'inspiration des chanteurs : la prise de boissons alcoolisées tout au long du *glenti*. Mesurée, afin de ne pas nuire à la performance, cette prise de boisson alcoolisée est également au service de la voix, laquelle est nécessaire à l'expression et au partage d'émotions par empathie. Cette voix qui s'exprime ainsi est au cœur de l'oralité :

> Radicalement sociale, autant qu'individuelle, la voix, en transmettant un message, signale en quelque façon la manière dont son émetteur se situe dans le monde et à l'égard de l'autre à qui il s'adresse. La présence, dans un même espace, des participants de cet acte de communication, le met en position de dialogue (réel ou virtuel), engageant ici et maintenant, dans une action commune, leur totalité individuelle et sociale (Zumthor 2008 : 182).

Il s'agit donc d'un véritable rituel social où les hommes, qui sont les seuls autorisés à jouer des instruments et à improviser publiquement, dialoguent en musique. Tandis qu'il est discriminatoire pour les femmes, le *glenti* prend ainsi un aspect initiatique pour les hommes, d'autant qu'il constitue un passage obligé pour eux : « À Olympos, tous se doivent, selon les strictes exigences de la tradition, de savoir chanter. Et ici, le terme "chanteur" se conçoit, nous le rappelons, tout d'abord dans le sens de poète. Le "chant" était un droit inaliénable autant qu'une obligation incontournable pour tous les hommes adultes[6] » (Makris 2007 : 57).

Une performance qui se transmet grâce à la mémoire orale

Dans le village d'Olympos, tout ce qui touche au culturel se transmet oralement, qu'il

s'agisse de pratiques réservées aux hommes ou bien seulement aux femmes. Tout ce qui intervient au cours du *glenti* – instruments, chant, improvisation – passe donc par la transmission orale.

L'apprentissage des garçons par la transmission orale

Les garçons apprennent à jouer d'un instrument en écoutant, puis en s'exerçant, dans un premier temps, à reproduire ce qu'ils entendent, avant d'être capables de développer leur propre style en ce qui concerne les variations et improvisations instrumentales. En effet, « l'instrumentiste, lorsqu'il interprète les airs, imite la voix du chanteur ou développe différentes voix sur la mélodie de base chantée, en essayant de l'enrichir et de l'embellir selon ses possibilités techniques et artistiques, lesquelles établissent ou non le "charisme" de l'instrumentiste[7] » (Pavlidis 2006 : 215). Il est donc important pour les plus jeunes de s'entraîner à jouer avant de pouvoir être autorisés de manière implicite par les instrumentistes plus expérimentés – et donc bien plus âgés – à jouer lors du *glenti* ayant lieu généralement sur la place du village. Pour cela, ils se retrouvent dans les cafés – lieu où les femmes ne sont pas admises[8] – où ils peuvent s'exercer et bénéficier également des conseils avisés des musiciens et chanteurs expérimentés. Ce qui est valable pour les instruments l'est aussi pour le chant et le café reste le lieu d'apprentissage et d'entraînement par excellence puisqu'il y est possible de se tromper sans que cela ne leur soit reproché.

De même, les chants dont le texte n'est pas improvisé s'apprennent par transmission orale et mémorisation. C'est de cette manière que de nombreuses chansons ont pu parvenir jusqu'à nous aujourd'hui et qu'elles continuent à se transmettre. La mémoire joue également un rôle important dans l'improvisation des *mantinades* pour les hommes qui se souviennent, sans le noter, de ce qui a été déjà chanté. En effet, depuis longtemps les gens avaient l'habitude d'entretenir leur mémoire puisque, comme le souligne Giorgos Giorgakis, « il n'y avait pas d'autre moyen pour enregistrer quelque chose, soit avec le son, soit sur papier (la plupart des gens étaient analphabètes) [et] les gens savaient en conséquence, si une *mantinada* avait déjà été chantée dans le passé ou non[9] ». Cela est primordial car une des règles d'or est de ne jamais rechanter un distique que l'on a déjà entendu

Le rôle des femmes dans la transmission

De la même manière, les femmes, même si elles ne participent pas directement au chant, assistent souvent à l'improvisation – à part lorsqu'elle se produit dans un café puisqu'elles n'ont pas le droit d'y entrer – et mémorisent des chants entiers et de nombreuses *mantinades*. Le musicien et chanteur Giorgos Giorgakis m'a expliqué ainsi que « de nombreuses femmes encore

Figure 6 : Imprégnation dès la naissance, village d'Olympos ; août 2016. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

Figure 7 : Apprentissage de l'enfant dans le *glenti*, village d'Olympos ; avril 2019. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis.

aujourd'hui peuvent raconter toute la suite des *mantinades* qui ont été chantées au cours d'un *glenti*. D'abord parce qu'elles faisaient attention à tout ce qui survient dans le *glenti* d'une fête, avec tranquillité et dévotion, ensuite parce que la mémoire des gens était cultivée[10] ».

Par ailleurs, les femmes jouent également un rôle dans la transmission de la musique, même si celle-ci est en grande partie réservée aux hommes. En effet, elles utilisent, d'une part, les textes des chansons longues comme des contes versifiés qu'elles narrent aux enfants qu'elles élèvent. Comme le souligne Manolis Makris, « cet emploi parallèle des textes comme contes a naturellement favorisé leur diffusion[11] » (Makris 2007 : 60). Il ajoute que « ils ne sont pas rares les cas où notamment des chanteurs de renom ont appris [...] les textes des chansons auprès des femmes[12] » (Makris 2007 : 60). De plus, cet apprentissage de la musique, mais aussi de la danse, est facilité par l'imprégnation du rythme que les femmes, en particulier, instaurent à travers les mouvements du corps au moment des relations de jeu avec les enfants dès leur plus jeune âge. D'autre part, les femmes emmènent les enfants, dès leur naissance ou presque, pour assister au *glenti*. Elles ont ainsi l'habitude de porter sur leur épaule les bébés placés dans un grand tissu et qu'elles bercent en les balançant au rythme de la musique.

Les enfants sont donc imprégnés dès leur plus jeune âge des mélodies ainsi que de l'art d'improviser. Quand ils sont un peu plus grands, ils vont souvent dans les cafés en compagnie de leur père ou de leur grand-père et ils participent au rituel d'improvisation, en assurant dans un premier temps la reprise avec le chœur.

La transmission à travers les associations d'Olympiotes

Il faut également mentionner le fait que la transmission orale perdure également au sein des associations d'Olympiotes créées sur les lieux d'émigration. Les principales sont l'association « I Dimitra » du Pirée en Grèce créée en 1948, l'association « I Anagennisi (la Renaissance) » de Baltimore aux États-Unis créée en 1952 et l'association « I Vrykous[13] » de Rhodes en Grèce créée en 1972. Dans un premier temps, ces associations regroupant les Olympiotes expatriés se dotent d'une salle où il leur est possible de se retrouver afin de partager des *glentia* pour diverses célébrations. Les Olympiotes continuent donc leur pratique d'improvisation poétique chantée et leurs danses alors même qu'ils se trouvent loin du village d'origine. C'est une manière pour eux de garder le lien avec leur culture et d'entretenir leurs capacités poétiques et musicales afin de montrer, lorsqu'ils se retrouvent à Olympos, qu'ils appartiennent toujours à la communauté.

Ces associations organisent entre autres un enseignement des chants, des instruments et de la danse, enseignement qui reste basé sur la transmission orale et qui permet de garder le lien avec la culture olympiote et les traditions pour les jeunes qui vivent loin du village d'origine. Cela s'inscrit pleinement dans le but de ces associations qui se sont créées pour préserver, transmettre et promouvoir les traditions du village auxquelles les Olympiotes sont attachés. L'association « I Anagennisi » de Baltimore explique que « lorsque ces leçons ont commencé, [elle] a enseigné à plusieurs dizaines de jeunes Olympiotes les premières notes de chanson et les premiers pas de danse[14] » (*Voyage from Olympos* 2003 : 26). Elle ajoute qu'« il ne faut pas oublier que pour la plupart de ces enfants, cela était leur seul moyen de contact avec la culture olympiote puisqu'ils n'avaient pas la possibilité de voyager et de se rendre à Karpathos[15] » (*Voyage from Olympos* 2003 : 26). En effet, les fêtes communautaires étant plus rarement célébrées que dans le village d'origine, les enfants ne pouvaient pas bénéficier de l'apprentissage par imprégnation. Il semblait donc nécessaire que les expatriés qui jouaient d'un instrument puissent apprendre aux plus jeunes, par transmission orale, les bases de la culture musicale olympiote qu'ils ne peuvent acquérir par la seule écoute au moment de festivités.

Cette « oralité primaire », selon les termes de Paul Zumthor, va petit à petit glisser vers une « oralité mixte », lorsque l'écrit commence à jouer un rôle dans la mémorisation.

Transmission orale et mémoire écrite

Les femmes jouent également un rôle important dans la préservation des distiques improvisés, même si celui-ci reste souvent dans l'ombre, sans doute parce qu'il est lié à la médiation de l'écrit, alors que pour les hommes, le distique est en priorité oral et éphémère. Dans un milieu où la séparation entre les hommes et les femmes est également matérialisée par la distinction entre la sphère publique – rattachée au masculin – et la sphère privée – reliée au féminin – il n'est pas étonnant de constater que les femmes passent par l'écrit car les hommes ont le monopole de la parole publique.

L'oralité des femmes

Tout d'abord, il faut mentionner que, même si les femmes ne sont pas autorisées en principe à improviser des distiques lors d'un *glenti* public où toute la communauté participe, elles peuvent le faire avec parcimonie lors d'un *glenti* privé, comme celui d'un mariage ou d'un baptême. Le musicien Giannis Antimisiaris l'explique ainsi : « Il y a des femmes qui chantent. Par exemple lorsque tu maries ta fille et que tu

sais chanter, pourquoi ne le ferais-tu pas ? Au moment du vin d'honneur, au moment où tu accompagnes ta fille ou ton fils de la maison à l'église, c'est-à-dire au moment du *glenti* dans la maison[16] » (Beïna 2011 : 765). Ce processus existe encore actuellement à Olympos. J'ai pu le constater en août 2016 lors d'une cérémonie de baptême à laquelle j'avais été conviée, ou encore sur des vidéos tournées lors de célébrations de mariage en juillet 2017 et en novembre 2019, qui sont accessibles sur la chaîne You Tube de Yannis Hatzivasilis[17]. Une ou deux femmes prennent ainsi la parole pour chanter quelques distiques de louanges et de vœux, mais cela reste une participation restreinte par rapport à celle des hommes, contrairement à la pratique qui s'est développée dans d'autres villages de l'île de Karpathos où les femmes participent beaucoup plus lors des mariages.

Il existe toutefois une transgression possible des codes car, même si le *glenti* est considéré comme une affaire d'hommes, il arrive que certaines femmes chantent durant la performance des hommes mais à certaines conditions. Giannis Antimisiaris précise que « [l]ors d'une fête patronale, pour qu'une femme intervienne, il faut que tu l'y invites[18] » (Beïna 2011 : 766). La plupart des femmes sont donc capables d'improviser de la même manière que les hommes, mais souvent, il arrive que certaines femmes – pratique liée sans doute à leur habitude d'écrire les distiques de lamentations – écrivent les distiques qu'elles vont chanter. Dans ce cas, elles le notent généralement distique par distique juste avant de chanter et se servent de l'écrit comme d'une médiation. Par exemple, lors d'un séjour à Olympos en octobre 2014, j'ai été invitée à une petite réception privée organisée pour fêter les saints Dimitri et Dimitra. Au cours de cette fête, des *mantinades* ont bien sûr été improvisées. Je me souviens qu'une jeune femme Olympiote, sans doute pour se donner de l'assurance car elle n'avait pas l'habitude d'improviser en public comme les hommes, a griffonné sur un morceau de papier chaque distique qu'elle a chanté et ce, juste avant de le chanter. Cette pratique de la médiation de l'écrit au cours d'une fête reste cependant rare dans le village d'Olympos, alors qu'elle est devenue une pratique très courante dans les autres villages de l'île.

Les femmes et l'écriture

En plus de leur habitude d'écrire des distiques de lamentation qu'elles accrochent sur le catafalque fleuri représentant le tombeau du Christ lors de la fête de Pâques, certaines femmes consignent dans des cahiers des distiques improvisés par les hommes au cours de *glentia*, distiques qu'elles ont mémorisés avant de les transcrire. Elles constituent ainsi des archives personnelles qui resteront pour les générations suivantes, en particulier lorsqu'elles ne seront plus là pour les transmettre oralement. Je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de discuter avec ces femmes qui réalisent ces notations textuelles afin de savoir à quel usage elles les destinent[19]. Cependant, étant donné que certaines femmes apprennent aux hommes qui en font la demande les textes de chants non improvisés dont elles se souviennent, il est possible de supposer que celui qui voudrait lire ces transcriptions de *mantinades* pourrait leur demander. Par ailleurs, un remploi de ces distiques ne peut pas être envisagé pour une performance puisque l'improvisation dans l'instant est la principale règle. La seule reprise possible de ces documents écrits serait une publication qui donnerait des exemples de distiques considérés comme réussis. Les transcriptions écrites peuvent ainsi devenir un moyen de conserver une trace des distiques improvisés en performance.

Ces notations écrites ne permettent cependant pas de rendre compte de manière satisfaisante de l'oralité des distiques puisqu'elles ne mentionnent pas comment ceux-ci ont été chantés, autrement dit sur quel air ils ont été improvisés et quelles ont été les césures, répétitions et reprises

effectuées lors de la performance. En effet, les transcriptions écrites présentent les vers sous la forme d'un distique classique représenté visuellement par deux vers écrits l'un au dessous de l'autre, ce qui ne rend pas compte de l'improvisation par hémistiche. « [O]n est d'une manière générale en droit d'affirmer que l'écriture donne à la parole une forme permanente. Les mots ne sont plus des signaux auditifs évanescents mais des objets durables. [...][L]es énoncés, parce qu'ils sont matérialisés sous forme écrite, peuvent désormais être examinés, manipulés et réordonnés de façon très diverse » (Goody 1979 : 143).

Cependant, la transmission par l'écrit de distiques est également une pratique qui s'est développée chez les femmes dans la seconde moitié du XX[e] siècle, avec la publication de distiques dans la rubrique des carnets mondains du journal local. En effet, après la création du journal *La Voix d'Olympos* (*I Foni tis Olympou)* en 1965, à l'initiative de l'association « I Dimitra » des émigrés du Pirée, les femmes multiplient les envois de félicitations pour des fiançailles, un mariage, un baptême, ou encore l'obtention d'un diplôme, ou bien pour marquer leur affliction à l'occasion d'un décès. Avec le développement de l'écriture de distiques dans les journaux, les femmes – surtout celles expatriées – diffusent donc publiquement au sein de la communauté éparpillée à l'étranger des événements privés qui concernent leur famille et qu'elles rendent ainsi solennels tout en rappelant l'importance des valeurs familiales dans la société olympiote. Ainsi, « l'écrit fait lien, il naît de la distance et comble celle-ci » (Artières et Laé 2011 : 82).

Voici par exemple un extrait des distiques qu'une mère a publié dans le journal *La Voix d'Olympos* afin de féliciter son fils pour l'obtention de son diplôme de Master et son entrée pour les études doctorales :

–Μες της Ολύμπου τη Φωνή, θα γράψω τη χαρά μου
πήραν καλά διπλώματα τα δύο τα παιδιά μου.
–Dans "La Voix d'Olympos", je vais écrire ma joie,
ils ont obtenu de bons diplômes, mes deux enfants.

–Λειτούργημα εδιάλεξες να κάνεις στη ζωή σου,
πάντα να βοηθάς παιδιά, με όλη την ψυχή σου.
–Tu as choisi l'emploi que tu feras, dans ta vie,
que tu aides toujours des enfants, avec toute ton âme.

–Ταιριάζει το επάγγελμα εις την καλή καρδιά σου,
εις τις ευαισθησίες σου, και στην ευγενεία σου.
–Ce métier convient à ton cœur qui est bon,
à ta sensibilité, à ta gentillesse.

–Γρήγορα εις τα χέρια σου, το διδακτορικό σου,
μας έκανες περήφανους, για τον προορισμό σου.
–Que tu obtiennes rapidement ton doctorat,
tu nous as rendus fiers, avec ton parcours.

–της γιαγιάς σου την ευχή, πάρε και τη δική μου,
γιατί αυτή σ' ανέθρεψε, από μικρό παιδί μου.
–Avec la bénédiction de ta grand-mère, reçois aussi la mienne,
parce qu'elle t'a élevé depuis tout petit, mon enfant[20].
[...]

Dans ces distiques écrits par une femme, il ressort que la présence de la tradition orale côtoie l'expression de thèmes issus de la vie quotidienne et reliés à notre modernité. En effet, la femme a recours a des expressions liées à la tradition orale comme celle de la bénédiction à recevoir – élément que l'on retrouve dans de nombreux chants de la tradition – tout en faisant appel à des termes liés à la scolarité – diplôme, doctorat – qui inscrivent cette poésie dans le monde actuel. L'écriture permet ainsi la communication sociale entre les membres d'une communauté qui sont dispersés dans le monde et en même temps, elle montre publiquement que les obligations sociales sont respectées. En effet, par rapport à l'exemple donné, les parents, dans un principe de don, s'investissent en finançant des études pour leurs enfants et ils reçoivent en contre-don la réussite de ces derniers à travers les diplômes obtenus. Ils y répondent à travers les distiques de félicitations, de même que des parents proches, qui se trouvent eux aussi concernés par l'honneur conféré par le diplôme, dans ce que Bernard Vernier appelle le « capital symbolique » (Vernier 1991 : 223). Il souligne ainsi que « les échanges de félicitations ou de poèmes renforcent les liens de parenté, dont la solidité est menacée par l'extrême dispersion géographique » (Vernier 1991 : 24). Ces distiques écrits préservent donc les liens, mais également la langue orale qui est parlée au village, puisque que l'écriture utilise le registre oral de la langue dialectale.

Les hommes et l'écriture de distiques

Cette diffusion – mais également préservation – de l'oralité par l'écrit se développe de plus en plus, d'autant que les hommes, influencés par les femmes, se sont mis eux-aussi à rédiger des distiques de félicitations ou de lamentations – dont l'écriture est pourtant réservée aux femmes – pour publication dans le journal. Voici par exemple quelques distiques extraits du journal *La Voix d'Olympos* et écrits par Manolis Lampridis à la mémoire de son ami instrumentiste et chanteur Giannis Pavlidis, récemment décédé :

Αετό μ' αηδονιού φωνή
σε είχε πλάσει η φύση
και το Σελλάϊ διάλεξε
φωλιά για να σου χτίσει

'Πό 'κεί ταξίδευε η φωνή
στον κόσμο απ' άκρη σ' άκρη
ένα φτερούγισμα χαράς
στης ξενιτειάς το δάκρυ

Κι αν για ταξίδι μακρινό
άπλωσες τα φτερά σου
ήχος της λύρας κι η φωνή
θα βγαίνει άπ' τη φωλιά σου
[…]

Aigle à la voix de rossignol
la nature t'a créé
et tu as choisi le quartier du Sellaï
pour y construire ton nid.

Depuis cet endroit ta voix a voyagé
dans le monde d'un bout à l'autre
un battement d'aile de joie
dans la larme de l'exil.

Même si pour un voyage lointain
tu as étendu tes ailes
le son de ta *lyra* et ta voix
sortira de ton nid[21].
[…]

Là encore, on est en présence d'une transgression possible des codes puisque les hommes s'autorisent l'usage de l'écriture alors qu'ils sont normalement ancrés dans l'oralité à laquelle ils sont attachés. Cependant, même lorsqu'il est créé sous forme écrite, le distique conserve les principales caractéristiques de la poésie orale improvisée, en particulier la présence de la langue dialectale orale.

De plus, le distique devient un moyen de communication privilégié pour échanger entre eux lorsqu'ils correspondent par Internet, que ce soit par e-mails ou via des réseaux sociaux de type Viber, Facebook ou WhatsApp. De la même manière que lorsqu'il s'agissait de lettres sur papier, les *mantinades* écrites sont échangées entre les Olympiotes séparés par l'exil (Kavouras 1990 : 249). Ces échanges écrits en distiques restent des conversations privées qui ne sont accessibles qu'aux seules personnes partageant le groupe. Par ailleurs, ces distiques écrits ne sont pas chantés et donc pas accompagnés de musique et ce qui est donc privilégié ici est l'aspect de dialogue ou de conversation spontanée. Il m'est arrivé de recevoir des emails ou des messages sur WhatsApp rédigés en distiques, pour des occasions particulières (échanges de vœux lors de fêtes diverses, remerciements). Pour Giorgos Giorgakis, cela découle du fait que la *mantinada* est le principal moyen d'expression en toutes circonstances :

> Les *mantinades* sont une partie de notre vie, tant musicales (audition), que orales, mais aussi écrites. [...] [I]l est possible que pour des fêtes ou d'autres occasions, on s'écrive des messages en *mantinades*. Cela peut aussi arriver collectivement sous forme de "chat" dans un groupe sur "Viber", où nous discutons en *mantinades* sur un sujet, la seule différence est que nous ne sommes pas assis autour de la table face à face, et que cela ne se fait pas en musique[22].

Il est intéressant de constater que dans le cas où les hommes écrivent des distiques, que ce soit dans la version papier des journaux ou bien dans la version électronique des emails et des réseaux sociaux, la forme visuelle qu'ils donnent à leurs distiques est un quatrain[23] où les hémistiches sont placés les uns en dessous des autres, comme on peut le voir dans l'exemple précédemment cité et qui est extrait du journal *La Voix d'Olympos*. Il reste donc dans ce cas une prédominance de leur habitude d'improviser lors de la performance du *glenti*, où la création chantée s'exécute hémistiche par hémistiche. Pour les hommes, ce qui reste essentiel est l'improvisation et l'idée de distique créé dans l'instant et qui est éphémère : une fois improvisé en chantant, le distique n'est pas fait pour être conservé par écrit. C'est sans doute cet ancrage des hommes dans l'oralité qui peut permettre d'expliquer le fait qu'ils se tournent plus volontiers vers l'enregistrement que vers la transcription écrite pour sauvegarder leurs distiques.

Médiatisation d'une performance orale

Pour conserver une trace de l'oralité des performances, des expatriés ont recours aux technologies d'enregistrement dès les années 1970, alors même que le village n'est pas encore doté de l'électricité qui sera installée en 1981. Ils utilisent d'abord les magnétophones à cassette, puis les enregistreurs numériques et les Smartphones pour l'audio, tandis que la vidéo se pratique avec les caméscopes, puis avec les caméras numériques et les Smartphones. Ces différentes techniques permettent aux performances d'improvisation poétique chantée d'être médiatisées sans qu'elles perdent pour autant leur dimension orale, puisque « intervenant après plusieurs siècles d'hégémonie de l'écriture, les *media* auditifs ou audiovisuels restituent à la voix humaine une autorité sociale qu'elle avait perdue » (Zumthor 2008 : 174). Dans le cas de la pratique d'Olympos, il est toutefois possible de nuancer ce propos car l'autorité sociale de la voix n'y a pas disparue, étant donné qu'il n'y a pas eu de passage par l'écrit qui aurait remplacé l'oralité.

Des enregistrements à usage privé

Depuis plusieurs années, des villageois réalisent donc des enregistrements audio

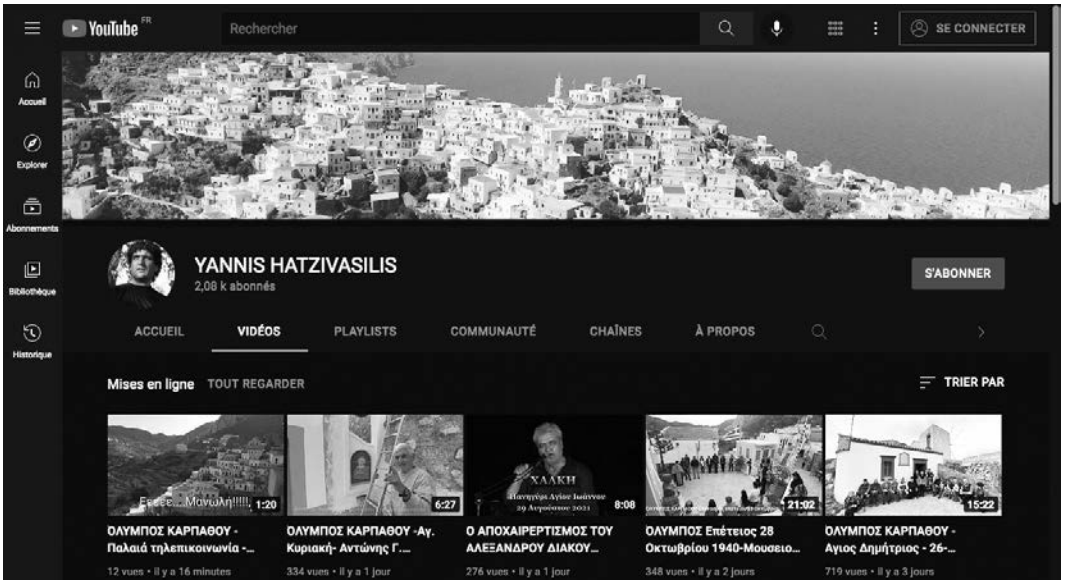
et/ou vidéo amateurs, qui sont avant tout destinés à une utilisation privée. Les premiers enregistrements sont réalisés en 1970 et 1982 par des villageois expatriés avec des magnétophones à cassettes. Par la suite, les expatriés ont bénéficié dans les années 1990 de la généralisation de l'usage des magnétophones à cassette et des caméscopes qu'ils se procuraient aux Etats-Unis notamment. Plus récemment, à partir des années 2007, ces appareils ont été remplacés par les Smartphones, les tablettes et dans une moindre mesure, les caméras numériques avec cartes SD.

Ces captations constituent des souvenirs de famille ou de la communauté et alimentent la nostalgie éprouvée pour le village d'origine. Elles sont généralement à destination des émigrés qui n'ont pas pu assister à la performance, mais il n'est pas rare non plus que les émigrés eux-mêmes, lorsqu'ils reviennent au village pour participer aux célébrations religieuses et aux *glentia* qui les accompagnent, filment ou enregistrent car « en quittant Karpathos, les émigrés veulent emporter, gravées dans leur mémoire autant que sur des cassettes vidéo, les images d'un village exemplaire auquel ils ont attribué la fonction de les réunir et non de les opposer » (De Toledo 1991 : 103). Toutes ces captations – qu'elles soient anciennes ou récentes – prennent une autre dimension aujourd'hui, au moment où la communauté villageoise s'investit dans la sauvegarde des traditions villageoises à travers la patrimonialisation. De ce fait, l'association des émigrés du Pirée se met à publier, à partir de 2005, quelques disques avec les premiers enregistrements privés réalisés dans les années 1970 et 1980[24].

Des enregistrements rendus publics

Cependant, avec l'avènement du numérique – en particulier de l'internet qui arrive dans les années 2000[25], mais aussi de l'usage des Smartphones qui se généralise en 2009 et de la facilité à enregistrer en format mp4 avec des caméras numériques dont certains font usage à partir des années 2000 – ces enregistrements sont de plus en plus diffusés sur les réseaux sociaux. Certains développent même des chaînes YouTube qui sont accessibles à tous, même à ceux qui n'appartiennent pas à la communauté. C'est le cas, par exemple, de Giannis Hatzivasilis

Figure 8 : Page YouTube de Giannis Hatzivasilis, Internet (capture d'écran) ; octobre 2021.



qui réalise de nombreuses captations qu'il publie après avoir réalisé un montage avec des sous-titres et des commentaires.

Son travail, ainsi que celui d'autres membres de la communauté, permet de constituer des archives personnelles et communautaires, à la fois sonores et visuelles, d'un « héritage du quotidien » (Knifton 2012 : 46). De la même manière que les écrits de la séparation ont le « pouvoir de réassurer le sujet, de le relier par quelques phrases inscrites noir sur blanc à son monde » (Artières et Laé 2011 : 82), ces captations audiovisuelles disent l'appartenance et sont inscrites dans le social. En effet, la séparation avec le village et le reste de la communauté incite les expatriés à marquer leur identité, leur appartenance sociale malgré l'éloignement, afin qu'Olympos et sa culture ne disparaissent pas. J'ai pu d'ailleurs observer, mis à part le cordonnier qui anime la radio, que ceux qui réalisent des captations vivent en diaspora.

D'autres enregistrements, réalisés au cours de performances, sont diffusés sur les deux radios locales qui ont été créées, afin de maintenir le lien entre le village et les émigrés, l'une à Olympos en 1988 – Radio Olympos – et l'autre au Pirée en 2014 – Radiotsampouno –, et qui sont disponibles à l'écoute sur Internet également. La plus ancienne, Radio Olympos, a été créée à l'initiative de quelques jeunes d'une vingtaine d'années, dont Giannis Prearis, qui continue à s'en occuper encore aujourd'hui. L'idée était de pouvoir diffuser de la musique locale pour les villageois qui ne captaient à l'époque que les stations émises depuis la Turquie voisine. Giannis Prearis a investit dans le matériel nécessaire et jusqu'à aujourd'hui, c'est lui qui prend en charge les dépenses liées à la radio. Il bénéficie néanmoins d'aides provenant des publicités diffusées. Radio Olympos a notamment une émission journalière où chacun peut adresser ses messages à la communauté, où qu'elle se trouve. C'est également au cours de cette émission qu'il anime que le cordonnier Giannis Prearis diffuse des extraits de captations qu'il a réalisées lors de fêtes se déroulant dans le village. Il précise lui-même que :

> La radio est un medium que beaucoup de nos compatriotes ont accueilli avec une grande ferveur à l'étranger mais également ici dans notre île. Je pense aussi que c'est une radio qui met en valeur nos traditions et notre chant, les *mantinades*. [...] Cela apporte de la joie à nos compatriotes quel que soit l'endroit d'où ils nous écoutent et leur permet d'entendre cette fête qu'ils suivent chez eux, ou à leur travail d'où [...] ils nous écoutent, il nous voient et effectivement leurs messages sont remplis de sentiments[26].

Les messages adressés à la radio par les Olympiotes émigrés expriment en effet la fierté d'appartenir à cette communauté et de posséder et pratiquer ces traditions, mais également la nostalgie du village d'origine. Les captations complètes sont, quant à elles, diffusées généralement sur YouTube. De son côté, Radiotsampouno constitue des archives numériques de captations qu'elle diffuse ensuite 24h sur 24 grâce à des listes de diffusion pré-programmées.

Les limites de la diffusion numérique

Il est possible de noter toutefois que l'utilisation du numérique a ses limites et ne remplacera jamais le fait d'assister en direct à une performance. En effet, le seul enregistrement audio restreint le nombre des sens mobilisés lors d'une performance, à savoir la vue, l'ouïe, le toucher, le goût et même l'odorat. « Disque, magnétophone, cassette ou radio, les médiats auditifs tendent à éliminer, avec la vision, la dimension collective de la réception. En revanche, ils touchent individuellement un nombre illimité d'auditeurs » (Zumthor 1983 : 238). Il est vrai que la seule écoute d'une performance ne permet pas de savoir quelles ont été les réactions des partici-

pants, qui s'expriment très souvent par des expressions du visage ou bien des gestes fraternels envers les autres participants. Les Olympiotes m'ont expliqué qu'ils ne peuvent restituer cette réception collective que s'ils ont été présents lors de la performance : ils se souviennent alors à l'écoute de ce qui s'est passé visuellement.

De son côté, l'enregistrement vidéo tend à limiter les restrictions de l'enregistrement audio puisque la vue est de nouveau sollicitée. Il permet donc de restituer cette réception collective, à condition qu'il soit réalisé de manière satisfaisante et que celui qui enregistre arrive à saisir les interactions des participants. La vidéo, à travers son emploi direct dans les réseaux sociaux, permet également d'abolir les distances. Giannis Prearis m'a ainsi raconté qu'une fois, à travers Skype, ils ont réussi à participer à un *glenti* en ligne. Les instrumentistes et chanteurs se trouvaient en des lieux différents – Olympos, Athènes, Rhodes et Baltimore – mais grâce à cette technologie, ils ont pu jouer de la musique et improviser des *mantinades* sur internet. Ainsi, « restituant l'image d'une présence, les médias audiovisuels menacent moins leur usager de cet enfermement symbolique. L'univers qu'ils lui proposent possède l'apparence de l'intégrité et du vrai » (Zumthor 1983 : 239).

Cependant, on perd un élément essentiel de cette performance du *glenti* qui est l'interaction directe entre les participants. « Ce qui fait la beauté de mon art n'apparaîtra jamais sur cette bande magnétique. Ceux qui n'étaient pas là au moment où cette musique a été jouée ne pourront jamais comprendre quels sentiments y étaient communiqués » (Lambert 1995 : 90). Par ces mots, le musicien yéménite Alî Mansur exprimait le fait que l'enregistrement de la performance musicale ne peut remplacer la présence à une telle performance. En effet, l'ethnomusicologue Jean Lambert ajoute que « pour Alî, ce qui fait la bonne musique n'est pas une simple matière sonore, que l'on pourrait isoler par une astuce technique quelconque, ni le texte poétique, que l'on peut transcrire sous forme manuscrite, mais la communication émotionnelle à laquelle le chant donne lieu » (1995 : 90). Ces remarques sont valables également dans le cas de la performance d'improvisation poétique chantée à Olympos car les médias, même audiovisuels, ne peuvent pas transmettre les émotions qui ont circulé au cours d'un *glenti*. Quelques Olympiotes expatriés m'ont expliqué que lorsqu'ils regardent une vidéo d'une fête à laquelle ils n'ont pas participé – outre le fait qu'il s'agisse souvent d'un extrait de la fête – il leur manque ce ressenti du partage des émotions qui passe par la communication des corps à travers la gestuelle, mais aussi le toucher.

Figure 9 : L'importance de la communication corporelle, village d'Olympos ; avril 2014. Crédit : Mélanie Nittis

Par ailleurs, « en transcrivant la parole on se donne la possibilité d'un examen critique de nature très différente » (Goody 1979 : 105) et il est alors possible, en passant par la réécoute attentive voire la transcription des enregistrements, de repérer plus facilement

des reprises de distiques déjà chantés ou bien des vers bancals. Toutefois, ce qui est valorisé à l'heure actuelle par les hommes dans cet usage des techniques numériques pour réaliser des enregistrements audio-visuels est le fait que ces captations constituent des archives sonores auxquelles ils peuvent accéder lorsqu'ils souhaitent écouter des moments festifs où ils n'étaient pas présents. Ces différentes captations, qui pour certaines sont accessibles à tous sur internet, sont également des exemples pour les jeunes qui vivent à l'étranger et qui veulent parfaire leur pratique de l'instrument ou de l'improvisation. Pour certains, cela permet simplement de réduire la distance entre le lieu où ils se trouvent et le village d'Olympos et d'entretenir leur nostalgie et leur attachement aux coutumes. Cette expérience différée renforce ainsi pour les Olympiotes expatriés le désir d'être présents la fois suivante.

Conclusion

La performance du *glenti* permet d'entretenir les relations sociales de la communauté car elle est une mise en scène de la vie quotidienne du village – à travers notamment les thèmes développés dans la poésie improvisée. Au cours de cette mise en scène, les relations sociales sont ritualisées, tout comme l'improvisation poétique chantée qui s'y déroule, et l'importance de la communauté est sans cesse rappelée dans la performance où le contexte collectif est nécessaire à l'improvisation individuelle. En effet, « l'improvisation se présente comme la manifestation d'une individualité dans un contexte collectif : il s'agit d'un apport créatif ou perçu comme tel par rapport à un donné musical, acte qui suppose une implication et une contribution personnelles et pose la question de la relation entre l'individu et le groupe » (During 1987 : 17).

Cette performance ritualisée met également en avant les liens très forts qui existent entre le territoire du village d'Olympos et les membres de la communauté, lesquels marquent leur attachement au village par leur perpétuel retour. Même si l'on garde un lien grâce aux associations et à la radio lorsque l'on vit en émigration, il est important aussi de retourner régulièrement à la source, dans le village-mère car la transmission poétique et musicale, du fait de son oralité première, se réalise essentiellement par imprégnation dès le plus jeune âge, en particulier lors des fêtes qui se déroulent au village.

Ainsi, malgré la présence de l'écrit et de la médiatisation, la poésie orale olympiote reste donc « enracinée dans l'existence sociale des individus » (Zumthor 2008 : 192) et elle est encore perçue comme une forme fonctionnelle par la communauté. Cette fonctionnalité est liée au fait que pour un Olympiote, selon les propos de Giorgos Giorgakis, « la *mantinada* est la première chose à laquelle pense quelqu'un lorsqu'il se trouve dans un moment sensible, de joie, de tristesse, d'enthousiasme, de colère muette, de moquerie, de plaisanterie ou de drôlerie de quelque fait, situation ou personne[27] ».

La prédominance de l'oralité est ancrée dans la vie culturelle d'Olympos et de sa communauté encore aujourd'hui. En témoigne, par exemple, la vidéo réalisée par Giannis Hatzivasilis en avril 2020, durant la période de confinement lié à la pandémie, au moment de la fête de Pâques[28] : il était impossible pour les villageois de se retrouver pour célébrer Pâques avec une performance comme ils le font chaque année, mais Manolis Filippakis a éprouvé le besoin de chanter le malaise qu'il ressentait du fait que la communauté ne pouvait pas assurer le rituel. Il s'est donc rendu seul sur la place de l'Église avec son instrument et a improvisé des distiques pour la circonstance :

Δεν ξέρω τίνα μ' έφερε ετούτη την ημέρα
μες στη καρδιά μου με κεντά της θλίψης μιαν αθέρα
Je ne sais pas ce qui m'a amené en ce jour,
j'ai le cœur irrité par un aiguillon de tristesse

Δεν θέλω να 'σαι ορφανό, Πλατύ μου, τέτοια μέρα
που σου κρατάει συντροφιά το σφύριγμα τ' αέρα
Je ne veux pas que tu sois orpheline, ma Place, un tel jour,
toi qui n'as pour compagnie que le souffle du vent

Πρώτη φορά στα χρονικά παντόφλες δε κτυπούσι
κι οι μερακλήες του χωριού να μη σου τραουδούσι
C'est la première fois depuis des années
que les mules des filles ne te martèlent pas
et que les hommes "meraklis[29]" du village ne te chantent pas[30].
[…]

Figure 10 : Manolis Filippakis sur la place du village, Internet (capture d'écran) ; octobre 2021.

Ces distiques improvisés sur la place du village par un homme seul s'accompagnant de son instrument montre bien à quel point les distiques constituent le premier moyen d'expression orale, lequel permet aussi de rendre public – et donc de partager – les moments difficiles. À travers son improvisation personnelle et individuelle, et bravant l'interdit étatique, Manolis Filippakis met en voix ce que ressentaient de manière intensive et dramatique – la peur de la désertification totale du village et la disparition des coutumes est sous-jacente – tous les Olympiotes, où qu'ils se trouvent dans le monde.

NOTES

1. Extrait d'un entretien avec le musicien Giorgos Giorgakis réalisé en novembre 2016. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

2. L'iambe est constitué de l'enchaînement d'une syllabe avec voyelle brève et d'une syllabe avec voyelle longue. En grec moderne, il n'y a plus de différence de longueur pour les voyelles, mais ce principe d'alternance a été conservé avec l'accent tonique des voyelles.

3. Dans le cas de l'assonance, seules les voyelles des deux dernières syllabes sont identiques pour chacun des deux vers, alors que dans le cas de la rime, les voyelles et les consonnes des deux dernières syllabes sont identiques.

4. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

5. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

6. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

7. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

8. Cette interdiction est liée au fonctionnement social de la communauté qui repose sur un système de lignées maternelle et paternelle, avec prédominance de la lignée féminine (voir Bernard Vernier 1991 pour une description complète du système). Elle reste encore aujourd'hui une règle sous-jacente, qui ne s'applique pas aux femmes étrangères à la communauté. Néanmoins, une femme Olympiote peut se trouver dans un café si elle ou son époux en sont propriétaire.

9. Extrait de l'entretien avec le musicien Giorgos Giorgakis en novembre 2017. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

10. *Ibidem.*

11. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

12. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

13. Nom de l'ancien village situé au bord de mer, abandonné vers le VIIe siècle suite aux invasions pirates répétées. Les familles rescapées ont créé le village d'Olympos dans la montagne.

14. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

15. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

16. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

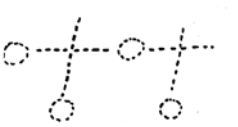
17. Les vidéos des deux mariages mentionnés sont consultables avec les liens suivants : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwP7NqDArrs à 28'52 et 40'03 (mariage juillet 2017) et https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsR4Ia-LLcY à 47'16 et à 59'39 (mariage novembre 2019).

18. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

19. Il serait intéressant de réaliser une enquête à ce sujet afin de voir combien de femmes actuellement pratiquent ces transcriptions et pour quelles raisons.

20. Extrait du journal *I Foni tis Olympou (La Voix d'Olympos)* n°346, juillet-août-septembre 2012, p. 12. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

21. Extrait du journal *I Foni tis Olympou (La Voix d'Olympos)* n°323, octobre-novembre-décembre 2006-janvier 2007, p. 21. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.



22. Extrait de l'entretien avec le musicien Giorgos Giorgakis réalisé en mai 2016. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

23. Les femmes les écrivent réellement sous forme de distique avec les deux vers de quinze syllabes l'un au dessous de l'autre.

24. Il faut noter qu'il n'existe pas une industrie du disque qui diffuserait cette musique car il s'agit avant tout d'une pratique rituelle. Il existe quelques enregistrements officiels qui sont généralement des enregistrements de terrain ou en studio réalisés par des chercheurs (Simon Karas, *Songs of Kasos and Karpathos*, SDNM, 1973 [vinyle] ; Christodoulos Halaris, *Music of the Aegean Sea* : *Carpathos*, ORATA, 1993 ; *Grèce : Musiques de l'île de Karpathos*, Buda Records, 1996 ; *Breeze throught the rosebush. Songs from the Dodecanese*, Centre des Études d'Asie mineure, 2000 [publication des archives de Samuel Baud-Bovy et de Melpo Merlier] ; *Olympitika. Chants de Karpathos par Giannis Pavlidis* [en grec], Université de Thessalie, 2001).

25. Les premiers foyers qui ont été équipés d'un ordinateur sont essentiellement ceux qui ont des enfants partis étudier ou ceux qui ont développé des chambres à louer pour le tourisme. Je n'ai pas les chiffres exacts, mais tous les foyers (il en reste peu à Olympos même) ne sont pas équipés d'un ordinateur. Quant à l'internet, il arrive en Grèce en 1992 et le haut débit est accessible en 2003, mais les îles et les régions montagneuses sont couvertes plus tardivement et tous les foyers ne sont pas encore équipés.

26. Les premiers foyers qui ont été équipés d'un ordinateur sont essentiellement ceux qui ont des enfants partis étudier ou ceux qui ont développé des chambres à louer pour le tourisme. Je n'ai pas les chiffres exacts, mais tous les foyers (il en reste peu à Olympos même) ne sont pas équipés d'un ordinateur. Quant à l'internet, il arrive en Grèce en 1992 et le haut débit est accessible en 2003, mais les îles et les régions montagneuses sont couvertes plus tardivement et tous les foyers ne sont pas encore équipés.

27. Extrait de l'entretien avec le musicien Giorgos Giorgakis réalisé en juin 2016. Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

28. Vidéo consultable sur: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU6SV5HGqmY.

29. Le "meraklis" est un homme qui connaît les codes de l'improvisation poétique chantée, mais également du *glenti*, qu'il sait animer par son entrain tout en partageant ses émotions. Il est reconnu comme un excellent improvisateur et il est généralement un bon danseur.

30. Extrait de l'enregistrement vidéo réalisé par Giannis Hatzivasilis le 21 avril 2020, jour du Mardi Lumineux (mardi après Pâques). Traduit du grec par l'autrice.

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Identification Narratives, Local Stories, and Virtual Communication

Stefana Yorova
Rousse Regional Museum of History, Bulgaria
stefana.yorova@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In this article the author summarizes some conclusions drawn following her field research on narration and identity. Language itself is approached language itself as a guardian of ideas, structuring society, using humor as an integrative barrier. It is introduced the term *identification narrative* as crucial for understanding the self in the context of the community. The author briefly describes the cases of a popular local story that changed local oral practices and of a less popular local story that preserved local oral practices. She analyzes the natural transformations of local stories compared to their translations into the "language" of virtual communication. The author explores the impact of new forms of communication on local cultures and how the narrative of the desired identity comes to replace the traditional social narrative of the self.

KEYWORDS

Narratives; identification narrative; orality; identity; Bulgaria; virtual communication.

In this paper, I present current insights into the relation between orality and identity, drawing on several researches I have conducted. I introduce the term *identification narrative* for a text that openly or covertly expresses the belonging of an individual to a specific group. I analyze several relations: between the act of narration and the self, between the individual and the community, between local narratives with their importance for the community identity and the narrative in digital communication. I search for patterns of linguistic behavior in all the cases described.

Apart from being a means for communication, language itself is also a guardian of information. Each different language has its own internal logic, inertia, associations, and cultural allusions, thus preserving an entire and very specific complex of ideas. Different aspects of language are both affected by this hidden semiotics and causing it. This statement is valid on different levels. It is based on cultural specifics in terms of history, linguistic groups and families, but it can also be found in regional dialects, sociolects, professional languages, and even in idiolects. For example, the Bulgarian language has vocabulary shared by the Slavic languages, but also many words which can be found in all the Balkan languages. The historical aspect of word accumulation does overlap with the regional one up to a point, but it also brings information about specific nomad periods and the integration of different ethnic groups over time. Professional language is shared by people from different countries who share a profession and a certain amount of basic knowledge in it. Still, it has its local diversity which can be so specific that even professional groups from one country cannot

understand each other—as is the case with the secret *Meshtera* language of the western Macedonian builders.

To preserve a specific professional group from outsiders, it is not obligatory to have an entirely different vocabulary. There are other linguistic methods to distinguish the group. In a previous research, I found humor to be one of the main barriers to integration that newcomers face in a social group. Humor is a certain view of the world, a perception of the world. If one can feel the world the same way as someone else does, then they will be able to react to the world in a similar way. The humor typical of a community maintains it as a whole and protects it, isolating it from dangerous "others." Humor generates secrets of the perception and thus behavior. Its assimilation brings the person closer to the mechanisms that govern and maintain the structure of a community, thus giving them power over it. But since they are already part of this community, they are also subject to these mechanisms. This drives them to keep the community if they want to continue to be in it and share the specific type of humor only with "inside" people or with people they plan to bring into this community. Otherwise, this kind of humor does not affect the listeners, and even with all good intensions and efforts they could only understand it but not find the "funny part" in a statement. Those who want to understand it but do not want to be part of the group are a potential threat to it. For example, professional humor is usually based on prejudices related to community-specific activities, workplaces, and problems. It is possible that an unskilled worker who is not yet familiar with the subtleties of the job may not be aware of a simple solution to a complex problem, known among practitioners of this profession. Of course, if one has already worked in this field, and they do a good job, they would be more readily accepted due to their knowledge.

Individual manner of talking is also influenced by the social experience and the cultural background of the person. I use the term *identification narrative* (Mincheva 2015b) to mean an oral or a written story, which is intentionally constructed and transmitted by the addresser, the latter being at the same time a kind of informant for us, the researchers. This type of narrative can be interpreted as a self-representational message of the speaker. In the process of selection and construction of the story, the author shares information that they consider important and significant in order to express their core beliefs. Each statement is subject to interpretive analysis. If it is a phrase, part of an oral or recorded conversation, it can be the subject of discourse analysis. In identification narratives, the identification can be considered an act of will. The mimetic mechanisms for culture assimilation are a basic condition for becoming someone via the presupposition that one acts, and therefore speaks "like" someone. According to Ivaylo Dichev (2002), this is caused by the desire for someone else's image. It is assumed that interpretive analysis reveals the psychological motives for the behavior and explains the speaker's position in a certain context. This can lead to the inferring of various mechanisms for prioritizing values from a person's identification narrative.

The mechanisms for prioritizing values should be studied not only as a motive in the characters of the stories I have recorded, not even only in my respondents—the people who have chosen to share a constructed narrative (which is the generally accepted model for ethnological analysis). We must also look for them in the variant choices of the researcher constructing this, as well as every other scientific article. In fact, all information transmitted is inevitably refracted through the individual worldview of the narrator, directly dependent on the specific socio-cultural historical-political context, and not only. Also, willingly or not, the author tends to speculate on the information at his/her disposal, usually for personal direct or indirect gain. Thus, the recipient inevitably turns out to be

manipulated. This manipulation is doubled once more, since it comes not only from the source of the information, but also from the ability to perceive it, the cultural experience of the recipient. It is this experience that largely determines the values of the individual, as well as his/her tendency to succumb to incentives to (not) respond to the relevant suggestions in one way or another. In such cases, ethnologists have to avoid direct assessments of the facts they observe, by claiming that they are subjects and that any possible interpretation is a result influenced by accumulated various influences and impressions. In any scientific endeavor, this application corresponds to human instability and variability according to the environment, cultural background, and current situation. In the field of the humanities, the most humane approach to the study of human motives, perceptions, representations, and actions is the "purely human" understanding of the person in front of us.

Local stories and narratives have a similar function of identity preservation as professional humor and specific knowledge. Here I will describe briefly two radically opposite cases I have encountered during fieldwork. The first one is the story of a local narrative that has become viral and has been recognized as an identification narrative for the people of Pirin village. The second case reveals an old local oral tradition preserved in the description of *samodiva* fairies in the Elena Balkan through a half-forgotten narrative.

There are not many communities that have preserved a vivid image of a dragon, with individual examples of help or harm, especially one who has its own house. It should be noted that the popularity of the Ginchov *zmej* arouses broad interest in the village of Pirin, its people, and stories. Quite naturally, the image of the Ginchov *zmej* and the different versions of the story about him become an identification narrative for the people from the village of Pirin. It is the disagreements and the apparently conflicting stories about the dragon that confirm the visitors' doubts about the historicity of the *zmej* image, while also encouraging them to consider which story is more or less likely to be true and pleasant among the local stories. Whether the *zmej* looks like a flying snake, a man, or an angel, a sun or a whirlwind, whether he keeps a treasure, fights with the neighboring *zmej* or chooses a bride, his image remains indisputable. It can even be infinitely multiplied by geometric progression, as the varieties of this image are added to the places he can inhabit and the things he can do—at the discretion of the narrator. It should be noted that the people of Pirin have found yet another facet of the *zmej*: as a resource for local cultural, economic, and tourist development. But these people are not at all intrusive with the stories they can share. They wait, ask questions, test; one has to gain their trust, to convince them that you have all the desire, readiness and impartiality to believe them, to tell them that one relies only on them for information. The researcher has to let them know that whatever they tell him/her will be considered important and true; they can even bargain for the information they give. And finally, when the researcher has won their trust, they are ready to tell the most bizarre things, to connect their stories with real people and places from the village, to explain how they got to know one story or other, to reveal to you the humor or the magic of their folklore stories.

The study of an image gradually reveals different levels of its functioning. We can first look at the media's popular presentation of the *zmej*, which aims primarily to arouse interest. Then there are the old publications of stories of people from Pirin, which have the value of real sources of Bulgarian folklore. Of course, we cannot ignore the scientific works that set various and interesting perspectives for the analysis of the original textual material. But then there are people's stories that we can hear in the field, which

have a special significance that can only be felt when communicating with a person. And then comes the observation—what these people actually do; and how what they talk about manifests itself in their daily lives. Finally comes the researcher's reflexive-interpretive analysis about the meaning and significance of all this. In my article "Being a *Zmej* in Pirin Village: Observations from the Night *Horo* Dance" (Mincheva 2015a) I analyze the *zmej* deconstructing its image on different levels. I describe its functions from the symbolic level of appearance through the folklore and the *zmej*'s social meanings for the people of the village of Pirin. I go further with my analysis, into social psychology, including the researchers and their place in the night *horo* dance as worship of the *zmej* of Pirin.

It is interesting to note that people are not always aware of the capacity of their folklore stories and the impression they can make on tourists and guests. It turned out that preservation of local narratives is possible even when they are not popular. For example, in the Elena Balkan I found two well preserved narratives about *samodiva* fairies that proved to be very specific for this region (Mincheva 2017). My informants did not point out that they were sharing something exceptional, apart from being somewhat supernatural. None of them claimed that the depiction of *samodiva*s they gave me could be found nowhere else, which turned out to be the truth. The town of Elena and its surrounding villages have managed to stay out of the range of ethnographers.[1] In the materials I recorded in the field, there was a special coincidence in the description of the *samodiva*s, which I have not encountered either in scientific works or in tales or songs from Bulgarian folklore. People from different parts of the Elena Balkan, who claim to have seen *samodiva*s, describe them as identical in outer appearance. Not only do they look the same, but they are all the same, with the same faces: oblong and matte. This would be a strong argument in favor of the existence of *samodiva*s, but here I will perceive it as a confirmation of a strong local folklore tradition. It is this detail related to the image of the fairies that suggests sustained communication between people from different parts of the Elena Balkan and allows for considering it an independent folklore sub-area in the context of the Bulgarian folklore.

The other story I have had the chance to record is a narrative about an army of *samodiva*s. According to my research, it has not been recorded or described before. Although I have written it down from people from villages from different parts of the Elena Balkan, from people who would not know each other, the description has been strikingly similar, though the storyline was different.

The images of fairies in folklore are complex and diverse. From primary hypostases of Mother Nature, through mythical creatures, to epic heroes of heroic folklore, nursing heroes or fighting them, to wives of heroes, the *samodiva*s are harmful or useful, they are always different. It is interesting to seek the reasons for the sustainability of these mythical images in folklore narratives. Nowadays there are still people who claim to have seen them. I suggested three hypotheses: a hypnotic natural phenomenon, real young girls dancing in the woods, or a lasting image in folklore narratives. These hypotheses present different perspectives on the scientific understanding of the phenomenon. The historical development of the image of the *diva* must be traced, as well as the multiplicity of the *diva*s and their different modes of interaction with people. Also, an analysis of the context for each individual meeting or story of *samodiva*s should be included. These narratives should be analyzed both locally and comparatively against the corpus of texts of Bulgarian folklore—both traditional and contemporary. If stories and memories of *samodiva* fairies can still be found in the field, they are alive in the folk memory and

are a defining category for the perception, reasoning, and reaction to various phenomena in Bulgarian folk psychology. As one of my informants, Stefka Gardeva told me: "If the word *diva* exists, then so does the *diva*" (Yorova 2019).[2]

Like all folklore texts, stories about *samodiva*s also change over time. Names of characters could be changed or replaced with nouns like *junak* or *samodiva*, parts of the story could be omitted or forgotten, or complemented sometimes with another story. Transformations of local stories happen inevitably. This brings about one of the main characteristics of folklore, its variability, which unexpectedly contributes to the endurance of folklore memory. Times change and so do means of communication. Folklore is no less vivid nowadays; it just has a slightly different appearance than the one we were used to. Communication is predominantly mediated by phones, social media, and online communication platforms. Yet identities in the traditional sense do not disappear, they are being translated into the language of virtual communication. In the age of virtual communication, the image shows a sustainable tendency to widely replace the self. Often all we see and interact with online is only a construct of desired identity, if not involving an entirely simulated virtual person.

Communication is formalized so as to avoid misunderstandings to the extent possible, though people would always fight for their right to be ambiguous. The anonymity in virtual communication allows everyone to build their own personality, usually in compliance with the common standards where excess is allowed as long as it features on the approved list. Thus, in contemporary folklore the narration of the *self* becomes a narration of the *desired self*. Contrary to expectations, this model of purification and formalization of identities, is not bringing communication towards a robotized fantasy future but is rather bringing identities closer to their mythical precedents. Archetypes become visible as every person tries to appear to be what they want to be—deprived of sins, flaws, and mistakes. Maybe this should not come as a surprise, since all we know is all we have ever known, or even less. Then society, even when communicating via the internet, is still the same society. The global network does not change communicators' identities much more than a traditional exchange of letters via the post would, making it just another mean of mediated communication. Of course, the diversity of possibilities for interaction between the social actors is at an unprecedented high. The challenges of virtual communication are circumvented by creation of groups of interest and the industry of leisure time threatening to devour a person's entire time. Still some aspects of traditional communication have changed. On one hand, in virtual communication our interlocutors see, hear, and know about us only what we share with them, which provides us some degree of privacy. On the other hand, traditional privacy is changed. All uploaded information is preserved, often available to our "friends." It is being stored by a third-party, and we are made to consent to it even not knowing for what purposes our (often sensitive) information will be used.

In conclusion, I would say that there are persistent traits of identity communication regardless of the communication environment. A desired identity can be affirmed in small talk, an interview, or social talk. Community identity can be shared with newcomers, or it could be preserved on many different levels. A story that is recognized as an important identification narrative sets the desired image of the self or the group, which people need to establish in their talk. Folklore narratives can be recognized as identity markers, and they can be used for popularization of a specific local identity. Folklore narratives can also not be recognized as identity markers but still carry the information of a strong local narrative tradition, implying the existence

of shared memory and identity. In virtual communication the rules for differentiating and preserving a community do not differ much from the rules which are valid for real-life communication. In digital communication the identification narrative is an inevitable part of communication, since one has to create their digital self, by teaching it how to become themselves. Thus, talk of the self becomes talk of the desired self.

NOTES

1. In 1913 the notorious Bulgarian folklorist Michail Arnaudov (1977) conducted field research in Elena and published a short report, *Folklore from Elena Region* (1913). Later, in 1972 students from Veliko Tarnovo University made a folklore expedition there, but the results of their work have not been published.

2. For more details, read my full research "Two Cases with *Samodivas'* Horo Dances in Elena Balkan" (Mincheva 2018).

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"I Like It!" Experiencing Mediascapes in the Artisanship of Prahova County

Marin Constantin
Francisc Rainer Institute of Anthropology, Romanian Academy;
University of Bucharest, Romania
marconstant2015@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

My text is an attempt at developing the heuristic potentialities in the *escapology* of video recording of anthropological fieldwork and, based on this, in the museum practice of posting videos via social media platforms. Ethnographic information is provided for various crafts from Prahova County (wind-instrument making, weaving, and painting) to illustrate both the artisans' views of their own craftwork and artefacts and the online responses elicited by such arguments, evidence, ideas, etc. Distinctive and interrelated cultural scenes and *dramatis personae* are identified and discussed in regards with: (1) doing ethnography and artisan *profiles*; (2) the museum policy of posting video fieldwork records and interviews; and (3) *feedback* in the form of *predefined emotions* and comments from *friends*, *followers*, or simply *visitors* of video posts. The article will provide a theoretical approach to the interpretive *continuum* and interactive reflexivity between artisans (as bearers of folk culture), museum specialists (as promoters of curatorial and research projects), and the online audience of folk art traditions and museum programs.

KEYWORDS

Craftsmanship; ethnographic videos; interpretive continuum; mediascapes; online posting.

Introduction

This text is quite an unexpected result of that strange and controversial state of doing ethnography in times of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In the summer of 2020, when I was still involved in a program documenting traditional artisanship in Prahova County—in the framework and with the support of Prahova Natural Science Museum, a county-level museum based in Ploiești—I needed to conduct short interviews with several local craftspeople. The concerns about maintaining the distance from my interlocutors required by the pandemic aside, I constantly endeavored to make video records of my fieldwork sessions. Initially video recording seemed to be just another routine method to keep evidence from the field that would eventually end up in the existing archives of museums or research departments. However, in my case, this documentary technique was to take another somewhat bizarre route, namely online (institutional) posting.

Of course, it would be illusory to claim that uploading ethnographic videos might still be regarded today as innovative in either anthropological culture or social media contemporary popular culture. Ethnologists, journalists, bloggers, freelancers, or other individuals managing their private online accounts are or may become potential hosts

or broadcasters of films about traditional lifestyles, folk heritage, crafts, artefacts, rituals, and so on.[1] The point is whether or not such heterogeneous categories of people who post (or at least some of them) can indeed share their reflection on what makes a video record ethnographic and, if so, whether or not a record thus defined is theoretically valid. It is with this (supposedly) disciplinary meaning that I will refer to the practice of online posting, as a case study representative for further anthropological conceptualization.

Before introducing the case, in order to explain its institutional framework, I need to return to the context of the epidemiological crisis that, like so many other countries of the world, Romania had to cope with in the spring of 2020. In fact, Romanian public institutions were asked to adapt their working programs and schedules to the state of emergency enforced nationally for one month, starting with the March 16, 2020. For Prahova Natural Science Museum, this implied restricting visitor access and, consequently, an increasingly urgent need for the museum staff (including myself) to identify new ways to inform the public about the ongoing endeavors of local curators and researchers. Online posting, therefore, sprang up as a practical method of reporting on and "advertising" exhibitions (particularly through virtual tours), as well as collections and artefacts that otherwise, given the circumstances, the regular audience would not have been able to see.

It should be stressed that, with the prolongation of the state of emergency beyond April 16, 2020, online posting as a communication strategy quite soon became the main type of interaction between Prahova Natural Science Museum and its (equally) natural visitors, friends, partners, and so on. As a result, my colleagues and I needed to seriously think about ways to constantly provide our institution with new materials and content that would show aspects of our work and would be *liked* and distributed on other online platforms. An ongoing museum program—Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County—made me hope that ethnography could undertake such popularizing mission.

Ethnographic *Profiles* in the Artisanship of Prahova County

In line with a scientific tradition inaugurated in 1956, Prahova Natural Science Museum (henceforth, abbreviated PNSM) is—as its name suggests—an institution devoted to a broad array of life sciences, hosting biological, botanical, and geological collections, alongside collections of paleontological fossils (both human and animal), crystals, and folk medicinal plants and herbs in storage. A laboratory for research in chemistry, biology, and mineralogy and a permanent exhibition including halls on anthropogenesis, human anatomy, genetics, biodiversity, and human population create an overall "old-school" natural history museum where humans are depicted as irreducibly belonging to their ecosystems, and also definitely indebted to them.

Before the 2010s, ethnography—understood as a science of folk culture—was largely absent formally from this panoply, as if the work of collecting, classifying, and exhibiting artefacts of local traditional groups was not sufficiently embedded in the regular agenda of a natural science museum. However, recent PNSM programs have been increasingly promoting fieldwork and research reports dealing with themes like crafts and folk arts, traditional ways of life and customs, etc. In part, this shift came out of the enduring interdependence between PNSM and Francisc Rainer Institute of Anthropology (Romanian Academy, Bucharest), an institution where cultural anthropology is traditionally integrated with other disciplinary branches like

paleoanthropology and physical anthropology. (Indeed, as a further bridge with Rainer Institute, the PNSM departmental network also includes Francisc Rainer Museum of Anthropology, in Cheia, Prahova County). On the other hand, PNSM has quite naturally enlarged its research paradigm benefiting from the generous environment created by several Prahova local crafts, such as ceramics, metalwork, woodcarving, etc. This is the context in which—from 2018 to 2021—I became involved in PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program.

In June and July 2020, between the first two waves of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Romania, I visited a number of artisans in the Romanian villages of Izvoarele and Măneciu (northern Muntenia). A folk culture consultant and director of Măneciu Cultural Centre, Lidia Pavel generously helped me to find my way to two local artisans, Adrian Mihaiu, a wind instrument maker, and Lila Miroiu, a weaver, recommending me to them as a representative of Prahova Natural Science Museum. I similarly benefited from the open support of Ioan Diaconu, director of Izvoarele Cultural Center, in identifying several folk artists, among whom Maria Ciripoiu, a wood and canvas painter. As administrative departments of the Izvoarele and Măneciu municipalities, the two cultural centers are responsible for preserving and developing the heritage of traditional art and folklore in the area, through initiatives such as revitalizing folk music and choreography among new generations and protecting and promoting traditional peasant crafts still practiced by today's villagers.

I was therefore interested in the possibility of observing the craftwork and artwork of my interlocutors in the very ambiance of their home-based workshops. (I saw this as preferable to interviewing and taking photos with/of craftspeople invited to local folk fairs). Under the rigors of pandemic legal restrictions, and especially seeking to respect elementary conditions of sanitary vigilance for my informants and for myself, I engaged in dialogue wearing my mask and keeping the sessions short, within the limits of first contacts that could later, once public health would go back to normal, give way to further and deeper investigation.

As a means of keeping track of my inevitably transient sessions, I continuously made use of my smartphone camera, which, while hardly comparable with a professional device in terms of video recording quality, at least presented the advantage of being portable—and similar to the smartphones or cell phones that are widespread today among Prahova villagers too. I would infer that smartphone use, especially to exchange phone numbers with my interlocutors, served as a means of *identity disclosure* between us, revealing its practicality when it came to making future appointments.[2] There is no need to argue that such visual evidence (even if modestly recorded) was expected by PNSM as proof that "I [as a museum employee] had been there!" and that the same images could represent minimal references for later returning to the field.

In terms of the interview structure, the talks with the Prahova craftspeople generally followed the line of life histories, as my interlocutors evoked their childhood experiences in learning their arts, the development in time of their work, their family framework of activity, and current details of doing artisanship. As already mentioned, our discussions took place in the workshops set up inside the houses of the artisans (which thus became a distinct and productive component of local households). Besides, in both Izvoarele and Măneciu, the artisans I met considered it relevant for their crafts not only to show me how they carve, weave, and paint, but also to let me see (and film) small collections of artefacts they had made and now displayed on the walls of private guestrooms or preserved in wooden chests.

Adrian Mihaiu (AM, born in 1982, one of my first interlocutors) lives in the village of Chiciureni (a small hamlet administratively incorporated in the Măneciu village). AM is a maker of wind instruments (flutes and whistles) who remembers how, when aged "seven to eight," *As I was going to sheepfold works*, *there was a shepherd grazing his flock, and playing such a whistle. I liked it so much hearing him playing. I was so delighted hearing it!* Our informant says he actually learned playing his whistles alone (at the age of thirteen), all the more so as *folk songs were already in my memory ...* However, he claims not to have followed a local tradition in his craft (such as one inherited from his parents), and that *for the first big flute I made, I lacked a template for at least what it looked like!* Instead, AM used photographs of such instruments, "multiplying" to "millimeters" the scale of such images to obtain the actual size of a big flute! AM's wind instruments are mainly made of an assortment of woods, including ash, beech, plum, and sycamore, which he gets from *the surrounding area*. Such wood varieties should be stored *in the shade, for at least two years in order for the wood to become malleable enough to cleave and hollow.* Our informant also describes his tools and devices such as a circular saw, gimlets or borers *fit for the making of either big flutes, or small whistles* and *suited to all the tonalities*. His flutes are appropriately tuned in "La [A]", "Si [B] minor", "Flat Si [B]", "Flat Mi [E]", and "Re [D]", in accordance with *the position of the holes*, with *the main sound coming out the length of pipe*. While recognizing that his instruments *are no longer played or used in our area,* AM tells us he currently teaches this craft to local children (including his own), and that these apprentices make up a folklore group with the support of Măneciu Cultural Community Center.

In Măneciu village, Lila Miroiu (LM, born in 1935) is a weaver that has been practicing her craft—*God's gift*—for *more than fifty years now*. Indeed, in tracing back the origins of this folk art in her family, LM invokes *grandmother-to-mother* inter-generational transmission (as in the case of the *Gillyflower* motif*)*, reflected in the *150-year old* weaving loom that our interlocutor still keeps open in one of the rooms in her house (LM complains about the current state of her tool as follows: *Just look at how ugly it is, I didn't manage to repair it!*). One of LM's daughters (who lives in Ploieşti) used to weave using the loom, *without caring too much* [about the craft] *however*. Artefacts like the *carpecioare* (little carpets), as woven by LM, are still wrapped around wooden seats and tables inside her house, while blankets and rugs drape and cover the walls and the floors of the same dwelling. However, as she offers most of her textiles to customers (although at rather low prices), LM says that *had I woven only for myself, my whole yard could hardly contain it* [the textile production]*!* Our informant argues that her decoration motifs are "national"—even when they actually originate in printed patterns taken from modern magazines. Likewise, while the needed dyes are nowadays simply bought from village shops, in the past they were extracted from local plants: *quince leafs, onion skins, and plum tree bark*. LM's textile artefacts thus emphasize a vivid chromatics that alternates or combines natural colors of the grey and white spun wool threads—which are also bought, and then warped), with plant-based colors like the browns or the beiges. Some of LM's decorative themes—the *Star*, the *Round dance*—are described as *ancient motifs*, while a composition like the *Three colors* is associated with the Romanian coat of arms, and also with the [Romanian] *national folk costume*. When asked about the endurance in time of her material artefacts, our informant claimed that *we can't live as long as they live!*

In the village of Izvoarele (6.5 kilometers far from Măneciu), Maria Ciripoiu (MC, born in 1986) is a painter and holder of a small *naive-painting* gallery in a room that also serves as her private art workshop. MC associates her talent for painting with her *primary-school passion for drawing*, with her self-taught canvas painting, as well as a later folk art training she received at a school in the neighboring village of Drajna (MC's trainers from that school are reverently evoked by our interlocutor in terms of having been *decent, aged, and experienced*). Our interlocutor uses canvas and wood (mainly beech and sometimes fir). After MC "chooses" the wood varieties from a sawmill in Măneciu village, they need drying for several months. Once sufficiently dried, beech or fir raw materials are rubbed and smoothed by emery, and then sketched in pencil. Another phase of the handwork is dyeing with gouache watercolors (provided from abroad by MC's husband). The gouaches should not be mixed with water or other watercolors like tempera or acrylic. As wood is particularly absorbent, two or three watercolor layers are needed. MC's thematic repertoire includes icons representing the Holy Virgin and angels (painted on both canvas and wood scrolls), and mostly what she categorizes as *everyday village life*, with motifs like *Animal husbandry*, *Hay collecting*, *Little shepherd and his sheep*, *Rich harvest [Pumpkin field]*, *Villager carrying a huge grape*, *Winter landscape with a fox visitor,* etc. In explaining her rich naive-painting repertoire, MC invokes as her sources of inspiration *childhood memories*, *imagining peasant life in the past*, and rural occupations (agriculture, beekeeping, viticulture, among others) that she depicts to be still practiced in her area. Our informant cannot paint two identical paintings—although she sometimes makes four or five replicas of one work. MC is indebted to the Ploieşti Palace of Culture, as a promoter of her work via folk art exhibitions and confesses that her co-villagers (including new generations) find it *complicated to learn* her craft.

AM, LM, and MC might be seen as *profiles* corresponding to branches of folk craftsmanship that in many areas of contemporary Romania (including Prahova County) are if not exactly disappearing, at least increasingly difficult to encounter and (even more difficult) to record for museum conservative priorities. As a matter of fact, all our abovementioned ethnographic references seem to stay outside of classic disciplinary representations of *key informants* for one or another craft. Indeed, while AM and MC are good examples of self-taught artisans, that is, less indebted to local traditions of either wind instruments or naive painting, LM highlights *au contraire* her genealogy as a weaver. On the other hand, LM and MC show little evidence of craft mentoring and transmission to new generations of craft practitioners, unlike AM's dedication to training children. Again, whereas AM clearly proves his knowledge of tuning wind instruments, and MC outlines her impressive *catalogue* of characters and facts of "everyday village life," LM's information on the origin and [folk] meaning of her weaving motifs is only generic in terms of their age or the national homologation of her artefacts.[3] There is, it seems, one trait that all three cases share: AM, LM, and MC obviously *master* important "technicalities" that stand behind the musical notes and the motifs that embellish local folk arts. Indeed, AM's mastering of *mechanics* in handling the circular saw and gimlets, LM's mastering of *ethno-botany* of plant-based extracts basic for weaving chromatics, and MC's mastering of *chemistry* of the gouache watercolors that fill the sketches she draws on wood bark, all exceed the usual approach to craftsmanship as a somewhat mysterious handwork, rooted in equally immemorial traditions, raising the question of how (after all) is artisan creativity thought of and carried out today.

Online Posting of Ethnographic Records

As already discussed, in the spring of 2020, in times of legal restrictions on visitor physical presence, Prahova Natural Science Museum resorted to the practice of online posting as a means to broadcast and promote its activities, specialists, objects, and collections that represent and recommend this institution to a wide-reaching audience. In theory, every PNSM curator or researcher was encouraged to contribute to the museum's social media official pages with texts, photos, and videos that fitted the assignment. I have to say that, for a while, my own efforts towards fulfilling said duty were rather modest.

To my colleagues' stupefaction, I was still lacking a personal Facebook account (the main social media platform used by PNSM). When some of them asked me, "Why don't you make your own [Facebook] account?", my answer—for them a clearly disappointing, disqualifying one—was, "Why should I?" On the insistence (quite gentle however) of the PNSM management, I associated my Facebook debut with a sort of feuilleton on some "anthropological lessons on an epidemic state of affairs," which were published on the museum's page, in five *episodes* (on April 6, 9, 11, 13, and 15, 2020). My material was rather unusual—resembling rather a theoretical article in size, the text was ill-fitted for the regular Facebook post format. Besides, my feuilleton lacked pictures, which as I would later find out could hardly satisfy the followers of such a reliable platform; therefore, the painfully low number of my fairly erratic viewers—no more than fifteen or sixteen per episode—was a surprise for nobody.

During my encounters with the villagers of Măneciu and Izvoarele, I also wondered how to put the video records I was allowed to make there to better use for the museum. As I previously said, according to PNSM archiving requirements, local researchers must empty their bags on coming back home from the field. Artefacts, photographs, or interviews thus constitute evidence for field reports and also documentary resources that are registered as such. I was convinced that my smartphone visual information could very well enjoy this respectable status for, even if as a minor part of the Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program, it was indulgently agreed on by the PNSM directors. Was this acceptable as a better use though?

I would like to prevent a somewhat epistemocentric reflection right here. My intention is not to evaluate the qualities or the limits of doing ethnography and museum curatorial research in Romania and elsewhere.[4] I am only interested in explaining how and why—beyond collecting and archiving documents from the field—such evidence might be usefully stored and displayed for further (potential) partners or interlocutors of the museum and the artisans themselves. This, I presumed, is or could become, the common-sense reason for posting ethnographic records online. There remained however the question, for me as a PNSM employee, "How to go about it?," and, last but not least, with what consequences for the artisan *profiles* above, as well as for the museum's online visibility.

A worldwide disciplinary event would soon provide me with an opportunity that I simply could not afford to waste. The American Association of Anthropology (AAA) chose to hold its annual *Anthropology Day* (or the AnthroDay) on February 18, 2021. To encourage local initiatives to publicize the event, the AAA posted on its own website the following announcement:

> Join the celebration by hosting a virtual or safe and socially distant event in your community, school, or workplace. Due to the ongoing pandemic, we will not be distributing "swag boxes" for in-person celebrations. We do, however, have a host of resources and ideas to help you get started for your AnthroDay events.[5]

Fig. 1: Adrian Mihaiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (February 18, 2021).

Once I heard about AnthroDay, and as soon as I figured it out that such a festive event was associated with ideas of an "online event" and "socially distant event," it felt reasonable to combine this with my much more modest task of publishing something "professional" on the PNSM Facebook page. AnthroDay, I thought, would make a very good opportunity for our institution to celebrate (at least) its *natural history* tradition, not to mention its Cheia Museum of Anthropology. What about also inviting to the party one of the ethnographic profiles I had just met in the two Prahova villages? After all, it was a celebration!

As a result, on February 18, 2021, the PNSM Facebook page was dedicated to Anthropology Day. A descriptive text told the visitors:

> We are happy to celebrate—together with our colleagues from all over the world—Anthropology Day, which takes place on February 18, 2021. We are pleased to remind everyone that Prahova Natural Science Museum includes the Anthropogenesis exhibition hall (in Ploiești), as well as an Ecology and Anthropology Centre and an Anthropology Museum (both of them in Cheia, Prahova County). Moreover, through its research and curatorial museum programs, our institution is integrated into the scientific structure of the Francisc Rainer Institute of Anthropology in Bucharest, within the Romanian Academy. We warmly invite people from all over the country and abroad to visit our anthropological sections and engage in joint projects with our researchers, museographers, and conservators!

The message was accompanied by a video link to a recording of an interview with AM, our interlocutor from Chiciureni-Măneciu village (Fig. 1), in his wind instrument making workshop:

> As a token of enthusiasm about and constant interest in the "science of man," we post a short video that, as recorded in the summer of 2020, is a (indirect) testimony of doing

> ethnographic fieldwork during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The protagonist of the film is Adrian Mihaiu, a maker of wind musical instruments from the village of Chiuciureni-Măneciu, Prahova County, interviewed in his workshop by LP, Director of Măneciu Cultural Centre, and Marin Constantin, a researcher with both the Rainer Institute and our Museum.[6]

The post was rather well received by our online audience, since AM's video had 4,300 views, 112 likes (out of which thirteen hearts), two comments, and fifty-seven shares. The two comments complimented AM and wished him to keep being "very successful" at his craft; and the other expressed the same wish in the form of a prayer, "God help *Adiță* [diminutive name for Adrian] to become more and more famous!"

The online echo of the post produced a vivid impression on the PNSM management. (They even asked me how I managed to "mobilize" all those followers, as if their "horizon of expectation" precisely aimed at such content of a museum public *window*. Similarly, an ethnology student from Bucharest University's Faculty of Letters wanted to know more details about my recording, keeping in mind that was already familiar with AM and his workshop in Chiciureni hamlet). Relying on these promising reactions, I proposed to the PNSM management another post issued from my previous contacts with the Prahova artisans, this time showcasing the weaver LM. The new post was published on March 5, 2021 (Fig. 2), accompanied by additional information on PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program and a video recording:

> Continuing our ethnographic documentation on the folk arts in Prahova County, as first illustrated by our conversation with the flute maker Adrian Mihaiu from Chiciureni-Măneciu ..., we now bring to the public's attention the handicraft of weaver Lila Miroiu from Măneciu-Ungureni. We recorded images of a number of textile artefacts (such as carpets, blankets, and woolen rugs), all made by Lila Miroiu at her 150-year-old weaving loom ... Our interlocutor was also

Fig. 2: Lila Miroiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (March 5, 2021).

Fig. 3: Maria Ciripoiu's presentation on the PNSM Facebook page (March 25, 2021).

very generous to give us information about her apprenticeship to the craft, about wool processing techniques (warping or dyeing with extracts of local plants), about her ornamentation motifs, and so on. Like our previous recording, this film is a result of Prahova Natural Science Museum's Research of Folk Arts program, with the support of the Francisc Rainer Museum of Anthropology and the Center for Ecology and Anthropology in Cheia, with the participation of LP, Director of the Cultural Centre in Măneciu, and of Marin Constantin ...[7]

The second post unfortunately scored less, with an impact of only 2,400 views, forty-one likes (out of which four hearts), and twenty-five shares. Of course, the lower interest of the PNSM [Facebook] audience should be accounted on the even lower quality of my footage, and not Auntie Lila's (as LM is called in the local community) skills at her craft. (As I would later find out, LP—my guide in the field of Măneciu—openly expressed her appreciation towards the video record featuring LM and how it advertised the local folk arts). In any case, as far as I could ascertain from Facebook's analytics, this film did not in fact underperform in comparison with the viewer average for other posts by my colleagues at PNSM.

So, I felt I had to make a decision whether to persevere or not, posting further videos about artisanship in Prahova County. And as I was convinced that the end goal of my efforts (also including English translation and subtitles for the films) was less to increase the number of PNSM online visitors (which indisputably was a major institutional concern), and more to diffuse ethnographic information about the current state of folk crafts and artisans in the area, I considered it useful to make one more try. Another film, this time bringing into the limelight the "naive" painter MC from Izvoarele village, was submitted for posting on the PNSM social media page. It was published on March 25, 2021 (Fig. 3), accompanied by a recapitulation of the previous chapters:

> We add to our series of ethnographic conversations (which started ... with Adrian

> Mihaiu from Chiciureni-Măneciu and continued ... with Lila Miroiu from Măneciu-Ungureni) a new field video recording—from July 2020—which showcases Maria Ciripoiu from Izvoarele village and her gallery of naive painting on tree bark and canvas. With a keen sense of observation and a special sensitivity, Maria Ciripoiu's art renders a chronicle of her community's daily life, through representations of local peasant occupations, such as animal husbandry, vine cultivation, and beekeeping. This film is a result of the Prahova Natural Science Museum research program, with the support of the Cheia Museum of Anthropology and the participation of Marin Constantin ...[8]

By far, the video recording of MC was the most successful. Its metrics showed 6,200 views, 116 "likes" (out of which nine hearts), twenty-eight comments, and sixty-nine shares. Distinctive marks of this public affection were emoticons like ❤(red heart), ❣ (heart exclamation), 🌹 (rose), 👍(thumbs up), and 👏 (clapping hands). Most of the comments expressed warm congratulations for the "beauty" of MC's craft, with one emphasis on her "[creative] ambition and talent for the fine-looking [paintings]." In one case, a follower admitted that she "listened to" and "enjoyed a lot" the interview, as it was an "opportunity" for MC "to become well-known by more and more people"; the same friend (online, and possibly in real life) stated she was simply "delighted" by MC's "art," and that she was "passionately" looking forward to meeting our naive painter. In her turn, MC conveyed her gratitude for the likes received, and especially for "the way [all of] you have the kindness to promote my work." Thinking probably about the pandemic context in the country, Măriuca (MC's diminutive name and also her Facebook username) wished everyone "to keep in good health," duly adding a 😀 (smiley face).

The PNSM Facebook page now offered satisfactory evidence, I concluded, for both the immediate realities of artisanship in Prahova County and the wider public interest in this category of virtual content.[9] Above all, Prahova Natural Science Museum had placed itself at the crossroads of unseen and yet vibrant networks of people who were now maybe more willing than ever in the past to take a (physical) tour of the museum galleries. As for my own contribution, that is what a museum employee is for, I guess.

Making a Theoretical Frame: From Escapology to the Ethnographic Present via Popularizing Anthropology

I argue that the abovementioned posts about artisanship in Prahova County might be theoretically seen as examples of *mediascapes* in the contemporary world, in that they act as an (online) interplay between ideas and representations which, at the same time, are private and public, individual and institutional, self-explaining and broadly acknowledged, local and wide-reaching, etc. Alongside other instances of "global cultural flows" including *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *finanscapes*, and *ideoscapes*, "mediascapes" are conceptualized in relation to those

> ... image centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality ... [offering] to those who experience and transform them ... a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets of metaphors by which people live ... as they help to constitute narratives of the "other" and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become prolegomena to the desire for acquisition and movement (Appadurai 1990: 299).

In connection to the *feuilleton* about artisans posted on the PNSM Facebook

page, for me, the keyword in the quotation above is "scripts," which (as it will be shown) eventually come to constitute the ethnography of Izvoarele and Măneciu artisans. Indeed several characteristics, such as "narrative-based accounts," "plots," "metaphors," and "fantasies," could be quite easily attached to the dialogues we engaged in with AM, LM, and MC, also to the meanings intrinsic to them (musical notes in wind instrument making, ornamentation and chromatics in weaving and painting), to museum online display of such "[folk art] scenes," and, of course, to online visitors. The mention of external referents for what initially could have remained a local, almost obscure, instance of a documentary approach inevitably expands our *scripts*—just as in the description of *mediascapes*—towards the *others living in other places*.

It is such indefinite, ineffable *others* (among whom the ethnographer is only an ephemeral "link") that invite our reflection on the amorphous arrangement that—via online connections—brings together mainly artisans, museum staff, and their audience. Within this quorum, mapping structural composition and interrelations seems illusory: each of the above-mentioned "actors" contains their own further individualized networks that put artisans in contact with tourists and museums with educators, mobilizing, on a case to case basis, distinct groups of *friends*. A discussion about the "modern value" of authenticity, for instance, in its relationship with the commoditization of tourism, portrays not less than three categories of "experts" (curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists), each with their own notion of *authenticity* as a "quality of pre-modern life and of products produced prior to the penetration of modern Western influences"; this comes in contrast not only with "the authenticity of tourists" (with their "experiential", "recreational," and "diversionary" hypostases), but also with an "emergent authenticity" as a "socially-constructed" and "negotiable" concept.[10] In this case, while the "experts" could actually be associated with what, in this text, I referred to as "museum staff," the PNSM audience (online or physical) is presumably the equivalent of "tourists" (Cohen 1988: 374–5, 378–80), as for the category of "artisans," it basically refers to "traditional artists" making objects "for a traditional purpose" in conformity with "traditional forms" (Cornet 1975 qtd in Cohen 1988: 375).

The point, then, is not to identify a network, a *newer* one among the older ones that are already classicized in terms of the mutual relationships that bind researchers to their informants and also to their research institutions.[11] In our own case study, the *primum movens* is not so much associated with one or another "referent" *per se*, nor is it associated with a particular structuring of them, it is instead associated with the Prahova artisans' agreement to be interviewed and video recorded as part of a PNSM curatorial program, and with the PNSM strategy to exhibit online in times of a sanitary crisis and its related restrictions on physical museum touring. At both levels, artisans and "their" museum seem to share an *aspiration for escaping the crisis* as motivated by, and materialized as, a *quest for visitors*—for both the artisan workshops and museum galleries.

To an important extent, such escapology impulse resonates with that principle of popularizing anthropology stating that "its practitioners need to engage with contemporary realities, in ways meaningful to subjects and readers and which tempt them to participate [in popularizing anthropological projects]" (MacClancy 2003: 46). The February 18, 2021 AnthroDay was, from this point of view, a meaningful way to bridge (as previously seen) a disciplinary event, on the one hand, and a natural science museum and doing artisanship in an isolated locality from Prahova County, on the other. The *bridge* was the hosting by Facebook, and the "temptation to participate" in this

first mediascape endeavor was the very initiative to post. (The referential *triad*, this time, is composed of "[anthropology] practitioners," "subjects," and "readers," the latter having the most in common with the category of *viewers* or *followers* from our own ethnographic report).

Another popularizing anthropology principle—according to which: "No present-day fieldworkers can write about peoples without knowing that their words will be read by the indigenes" (MacClancy 2003: 3)—is even more clearly related to the mediascape experience of my interlocutors from Izvoarele and Măneciu, and my own, too. Indeed, posting online video recordings of AM, LM, and MC is preceded (on the PNSM Facebook page) by brief but clear introductions of each artisan, their villages, and their craft specializations. All the posts render the ethnographer's voice, and two of them also reveal his physical presence during the interviewing sessions. As already mentioned, the ethnographer kept in touch with his informants via phone conversations (which preceded and set further shared events in the field), making sure to obtain their consent on the online publishing of audiovisual information about them and their workshops. Feedback from the artisans' friends (as online followers) and from acquaintances that the artisans and I shared (PNSM staff, students, among others) quickly grew into prosaic dialogues meant to enrich museum archives, into mass-media products for a larger public interest. What I particularly appreciated was to notice how people from various communities and institutional spheres generally enjoy talking about folk arts, and that the internet dissemination of ethnographic records is definitely a good thing.

A few words, however, have to be said on the process of turning the "scripts" (as "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality") into "complex sets of metaphors that help the people to constitute ... proto-narratives of possible lives [and] fantasies" (see Appadurai above). Although the interviews pursued with AM, LM, and MC are essentially dialogic and to a much lesser degree evocative, as they are broadcast, they also express elements of folk philosophy particularly significant for the manner in which these artisans situate their work within the traditional *datum* of an ethnographic present.[12] AM's claim that "folk songs [already] were in my memory"—in the context of his self-taught initiation in the art of wind instrument making—is fairly consistent with LM's conviction that "we can't live as long as they [her weaving artefacts] live!" As for MC's "everyday village life" as a generative matrix of naive-painting characters and landscapes, it may be similarly represented as a continuum of an autarkic and traditional lifestyle. This is, I believe, the script—at the same time familiar and strange—within which the artisan local creativity and the museum's opening to the World Wide Web are both given inspirational resources and mediascaping tools. Between what *is* felt to be immemorial and perennial, in the village temporality, and what *should be* lived as brief and up-to-the-minute, in the mass media *instantaneity*, the online narrative of artisanship "as the story goes" in Prahova County provides closer of more faraway *readers* or *viewers* with vestiges and prospects of a (sort of) *promised land*, which they can still attain—every time they happen to "like" it.

Instead of Conclusions: Ethnographic Drama and Social Media Profiles on a World Wide Web Museum Scene

The article cited above focusing on the broadcasting of ethnographic work reminds all of us that "we [as practitioners of anthropology] should be aware that there is an audience outside the scientific community" and, since the informants "come

to think about their ethnographies", we (the members of the "scientific community") "should include them in the processes of exchange and responding *to* us" (Wühelmeier 2000: 48–9). There is no need to argue on the extent to which *our* artisans have been 'included' in this text, as their presence is practically co-auctorial to the *story* of it. Indeed AM, LM, and MC are *in* not only in their workshops and exhibitions locally organized by PNSM, but also as *dramatis personae* on a much larger *cultural scene*, that of a (museum) social media page, due to which a WWW audience can see and hear "where they come from, what they are, and where they are going."

One of the consequences of such development is that the artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu become main references on the *interpretive continuum* they engage in with their virtual *friends* and, to a smaller extent, however, with the ethnographer and the museum specialists. (As a matter of fact, PNSM's archiving program and Facebook page, as well as my own ethnographic enterprise, might be seen as auxiliary only in comparison with the prominence of the artisans as the real protagonists of the *script* and the *play* they perform on *their* ethnographic stage). It is within this *folk theater* arena that an interactive reflexivity is unleashed online on what the creative folk arts actually are or should be, on the manner in which the artisans' fame is to be built, on how the artefacts are adequately "tuned," durable, "naive," and so on.

Beyond its own curatorial agenda, Prahova Natural Science Museum certainly managed to be the friendly host of an ethnographic drama that, in its turn, needed a museum *platform* (and not simply an art gallery) in order to take place. Where PNSM required documents for its archives and database to be published online, local artisans were to discover the benefits of an institutional connection through which their work would receive public recognition and appreciation. As for the PNSM website visitors, their perception probably was that of the spectators of a museum-administered *mise-en-scène*, able to capture and present veritable folk culture values—in any case, something much more reliable than an ordinary smartphone video recording.

NOTES

1. A well-known example here is that of journalist Jean-Pierre Dutilleux's video recording of the Toulambi in Papua New Guinea (*Tribe Meets White Man for the First Time,* directed by Jean-Pierre Dutilleux (1976), with 380,562 views on November 22, 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDzGJ9IN240). See also (as regards ethnographic realities from Romania) Dumitru Budrală's "observational film" on the "[transhumant] sheep road" [*On the Road* (*La drum*), directed by Dumitru Budrală (1997), with 239,666 views on November 22, 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=se9S2U_L1og&t=71s].

2. In the course of August of 2020, I regularly communicated by phone with artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu (including AM, LM, and MC) in order to plan together our travel to Cheia, where Prahova Natural Science Museum organized a folk fair with stalls exhibiting artefacts from the area.

3. The accounts of AM, LM, and MC can hypothetically be correlated to oral traditions of the crafts of wind instrument making, weaving, and wood painting, respectively, in Prahova County. From the information I gathered, I could neither confirm, nor dismiss the existence of such traditions, which, as a result, makes them open to further and deeper investigation. Apart from AM and MC who are self-taught, all our field interlocutors evoked unwritten sources for their knowledge, including (as seen before) a shepherd's flute performance (AM), matrilineal teaching of weaving (LM), and folk art training by external teachers (MC). Such trait—unwritten transmission of craftsmanship—could provisionally place our three cases in the category of the so-called "peoples without writing" (Vansina 1969: 1). On the other hand, given the very provisional status of AM, LM, and MC as bearers of (possible) older traditions in their folk arts, they could hardly constitute "links" in any "chain of [traditional] transmission" (in Vansina's conceptualization, 1969: 21). Indeed, until further research, the three artisans from Izvoarele and Măneciu are actually "final informants" of what they say about their own crafts; their accounts represent "final testimonies" which the ethnographer can only collect as the "earliest written record," one relevant (or not) for "proto-testimonies" of "facts" belonging to ancestral traditions (Vansina 1969: 21).

4. See, for instance, the theoretical and methodological implications of doing *anthropology at home proper* in Romania. Thus, in the case of studying the researcher's own birth locality, "aggression and humility" (in anthropological knowledge) "can be surpassed" based on traits like "the adoption of local phonemic behaviour" and "the reflective characteristic of my profession"—all the more so because "psychically, I have never left my village [of Soveja, Vrancea County, Romania]" (Geană 2014: 97–113). For a general perspective on the organizing principles of open-air (sociological and ethnographic) museums in Romania (among which the Sibiu Museum of Folk Civilization, the Bucharest Village Museum, and the Cluj-Napoca Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania), see Academia de Ştiinţe... (1971). As regards a larger discussion on the epistemological and institutional condition of doing anthropology in post-socialist countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia, an important case-study resource is Skalnìk (2002).

5. See [www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=13307].

6. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/anthropology-international-day/748034415854095/].

7. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/programul-muzeului-de-%C5%9Ftiin%C5%A3e-ale-naturii-de-cercetare-a-artei-tradi%C5%A3ionale-din-/155292629768889].

8. See [www.facebook.com/muzeuljudeteanstiintelenaturii prahova/videos/ad%C4%83ug%C4%83m-seriei-noastre-de-convorbiri-etnografice-%C3%AEnceput%C4%83-%C3%AEn-18-februarie-cu-dl-/488317342300948/].

9. The social media coverage of AM, LM, and MC, with its local, institutional, and global layers of village workshops, museum archives, and social media platforms, may be compared with the "regressive quest for authenticity" of (Romanian) artisans identified first within a folk life festival in Washington, then in the open-air museums of Bucharest and Sibiu, and last in the artisans' home-based workshops in villages from Argeş, Iaşi, and Vrancea counties (Constantin 2015).

10. See also the "three groups of recipients" of the ethnography of a German village, namely the people in the village, the local press, and the television (Wühelmeier 2000: 45).

11. See, for instance, Ivo Strecker's exchange of experience with Baldambe, his informant and lifelong friend from the Hamar in Dambaiti, Southern Ethiopia, during the anthropologist's extended fieldwork among the Hamar, and then his invitation to Baldambe to travel to Europe in order to "help [Strecker's] courses" at the Johannes Guttenberg University of Mainz (Strecker 1998: 65).

12. In anthropological research, the ethnographic present is associated with "a timeless description of the people being studied," based on an approach that "implicitly denies the historicity of these people" (Davies 2002: 156–8). From another point of view, taking into account "specific generations" and different "sociocultural contexts" characterizing people that "the ethnographer knows and speaks to," the ethnographic present is reconsidered in relation to the "conjunctural nature of all ethnography" as a necessary "practice in anthropology" (Pina-Cabral 2000: 344, 347). As a result, the "ethnographic present" from the "philosophical" ideas of Prahova artisans should be integrated with the "conjunctural nature" of my interlocutors' different ages, as well as of my own ethnographic documentation for PNSM's Research of Folk Arts in Prahova County program.

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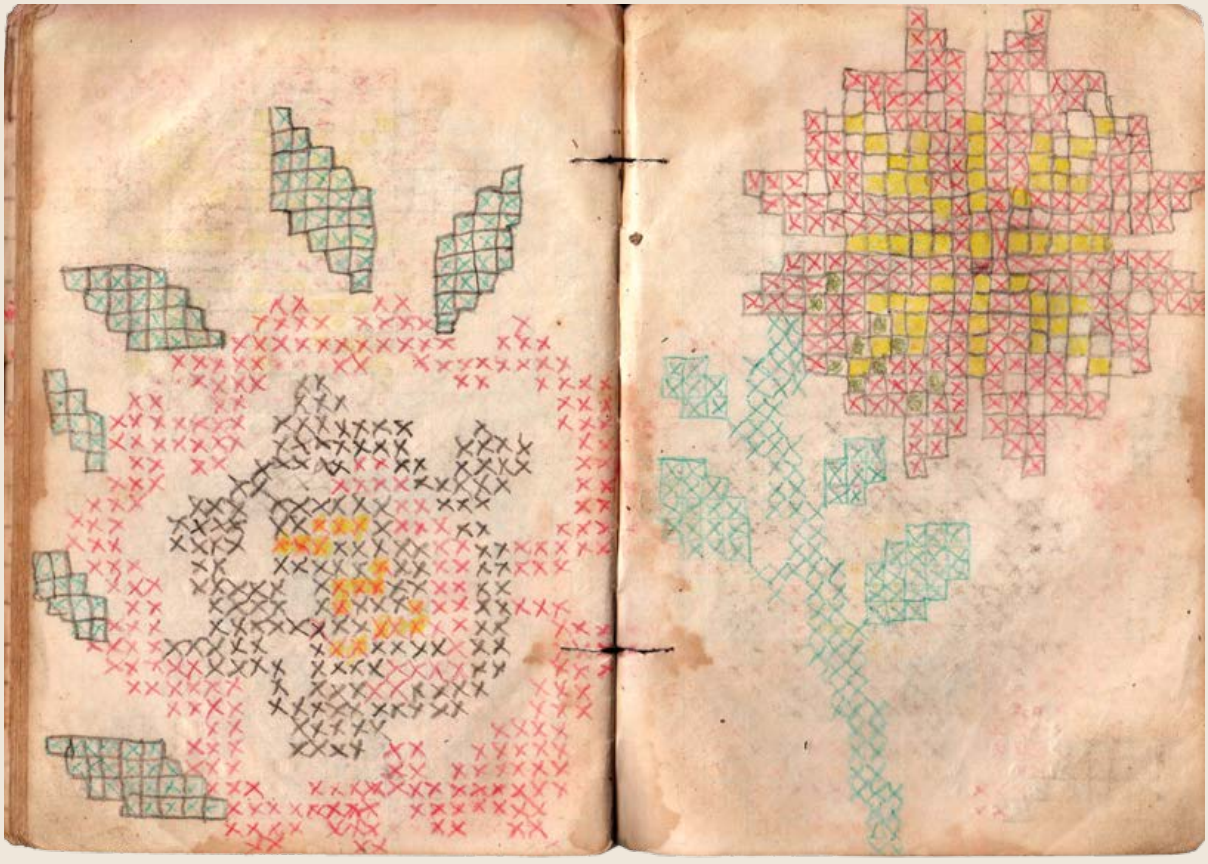

III. Orality on Display

Images 1 and 2
Amulets for Beauty by Laura Dimitrova. Photo credits by the authors.

Creative Traditions and Cultural Projects: Re-thinking Heritage through Experience

Krassimira Krastanova
"Paisii Hilendarski" Plovdiv University, Bulgaria
krassikr@gmail.com

Maria Kissikova
"Paisii Hilendarski" University Plovdiv, Bulgaria
mariakissikova@yahoo.com

Elitsa Stoilova
"Paisii Hilendarski" Plovdiv University, Bulgaria
elitsastoilova@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the potential of project activities and project culture in creating novel conditions for introducing and re-thinking the complex nature of heritage, its transmission, practice, and new applications. Today, preindustrial knowledge, skill, and practice are interpreted rather as heritage that carries the potential of "creative traditions." In modern societies, they can be incorporated in different fields—from educational programs for kids and adolescents to the tendency to integrate them into creative projects and cultural and creative industries. A key role in this process is played by ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and interpreters of cultural heritage, but also as "cultural workers." The paper is based on the case study of a project in the textile field, where elements of intangible cultural heritage were used and re-thought in the context of new forms of culture (ArtLabs for experimenting and innovation in textile art, a storytelling event, a festival, creative interpretations, and sensory and emotional experiences). Here we present and analyze a project that used an integrated approach to cultural heritage, carried out in 2019 in the city of Plovdiv, with the participation of ethnologists, anthropologists, artists, and students.

KEYWORDS

Creative traditions; cultural heritage; cultural projects; re-thinking heritage through experience.

Inherited preindustrial technologies are a key issue today. In most cases, the knowledge and experience coming from the past are devalued and, in order to be perceived and understood as tangible and intangible heritage, actions are needed for their valorization and reconstruction. This article shows the potential of project activities implemented in the framework of a "culture of development" concept, which provides an opportunity to create new conditions for introduction to and re-thinking of the complex nature of cultural heritage, its transmission, practice and new applications. The culture of development is characterized by the ability to mobilize the skills necessary for creating and carrying out projects with certain aims, assigned on the basis of analyses, strategies, and policies. The anthropological knowledge of local context features can supplement and significantly enhance the approach of development specialists (Bouju 2013: 34–36). Furthermore, anthropologists can include their expertise in the projects not only for clarification of the context characteristics in a given project, but also to impart and apply their knowledge towards

achieving certain goals fundamental to the development of society. Anthropology mobilizes one of the most complex concepts that offers a framework for understanding human activities, *culture*. Marshal Sahlins defined it as a symbolic order, which mediates perception and action in the world, and a set of meaningful schemes informing a variety of human activities (1976). As they participate in applied (cultural) projects, anthropologists become cultural workers, a case study of which we discuss in this text.

Understanding and evaluating textile, cultural technologies and artisan practices as heritage passed on from preindustrial societies is a step towards a shared experience between generations. While the objects of that production have a material dimension and can relatively quickly have their qualities and characteristics evaluated, the skills involved are extremely fragile and can easily be lost, as they represent the living and non-artificial character of cultural expression (Fabre 2007: 1–4). Intangible cultural heritage seen through the prism of temporality to a large extent sets the policies of its preservation and sustainability. According to Nathalie Heinich, the aspiration to conserve so-called traditional practices—storytelling, singing and dancing, artisan skills and production—creates a form of "symbolic protection"; it is based on the studying, reporting and documenting of such practices, as a primary means of understanding and acknowledging them as heritage (Heinich 2009). Chiara Bortolotto stresses that this kind of protection of cultural heritage has its disadvantages, because it does not reflect its viability, practice, and transmission as important steps in the process of its preservation—which are specifically mentioned in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Convention 2003; Bortolotto 2011). In actuality, the difficulty in accepting the "preservation through practice" thesis stems from the dynamic character of knowledge and skills, but also from the requirement to always take into account the community and its applied forms of cultural expression. This approach provides an opportunity to turn attention towards and insist on their actual practice and transmission, through which they would achieve sustainability in time.

A European Union policy goal, the sustainability of cultural heritage is the focus of a process of transformation today, i.e., it is perceived as an important pillar of identity, at the same time as a source of social innovation for an intelligent, sustainable, and inclusive growth (Communication 2014). An integrated approach is recommended for its preservation, directed towards its inclusion in the overall cultural sphere, in order to revitalize and make it meaningful according to the needs of contemporary society. To that end, the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe was created in Bulgaria in 2008 under the auspices of UNESCO. Its mission is to "carry out initiatives for safeguarding and popularization of the intangible cultural heritage of the countries in South-Eastern Europe; Encourage and coordinate the research of practices of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage elements applied in the South-Eastern European countries" (Regional Centre SICHSE Europe 2022). In support of this task, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture created a National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage and a National Living Human Treasures System, whose aim is "to encourage those who embody intangible cultural heritage to practice the activities and pass the knowledge and skills to the next generations" (Ministry of Culture 2022). As a result of the Living Human Treasures campaigns, national elements of intangible cultural heritage were recorded in the Register and were thus prepared to be listed as UNESCO heritage. For the period 2008–2016, there were thirty practices listed in the Register, most of which illustrate, in a well preserved form, folklore in its

syncretism—as a complex of sound, motion, speech, ritual, etc. Among them, there are five crafts listed, i.e., weaponry, woodworking and woodcarving, carpet weaving, belt weaving,1 and fishing net making (Ministry of Culture 2022). The collected data shows that the preservation, valorization, and transmission of traditional crafts to the next generations present challenges.

Here we have to also take into account the way in which cultural technologies and crafts are practiced, considering the social and economic context. First, following Vintilă Mihăilescu's reflections, we can note that transmission of artisan knowledge and skills in preindustrial societies is regulated by the power of custom (2017: 9–13). For a long period throughout their existence, crafts were an inseparable part of the other spheres of human knowledge and experience. Technology plays an extremely important role as mediator between a person and the environment in the context of mastering natural resources and production of all things necessary. It combines the applied tools and techniques that are subject to the logic of knowledge. Technology is viewed not only as a range of operations and recipes, but as a specific knowledge set that reflects the overall level of collective experience (Haudricourt 1987). As a result of the distribution of social roles between genders, the tangible production is concentrated in two main spheres—masculine and feminine. The mastery of artisan knowledge and skills by a person in a household or professional society to a large extent determines their place in the social hierarchy (Krastanova 2002). The significance of status for sustaining the established organization in a society gives a sense of value, which, in turn, promotes the safeguarding of traditional means of production.

With the advance of industrialization in production and the modernization of society, artisan production was partly or fully abandoned. Today it is increasingly reconsidered in light of tradition that contains in itself, like a reflection in a mirror, the complex character of craftsmanship.

Because of crafts transformed nature, we can include crafts and craft technologies in the wider field of "creative traditions" (Mihăilescu 2017). According to Mihăilescu, "'creative traditions' are not a field in its own right but rather a means towards an emerging ecology of heritage. They are a pragmatic means of linking past and present into a sustainable and meaningful development" (2017: 23). For precision, Mihăilescu defines these traditions not so much as objects and practices, coming from the past, but as an inherited life and creative experience and a shared "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2005). This makes it possible to include creative traditions today in a variety of fields—from educational programs for children and adolescents, through striving to include them in creative projects, to their development in cultural and creative industries.

In order for this to come true, it is necessary for crafts to undergo innovation and be given new life. From reading UNESCO policy documents on ways to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage available on their website, it becomes clear that this requires an act of invention, rediscovery and reconstruction, which is a conscious recreation, including an attempt to resurrect elements of the intangible cultural heritage. We believe that this endeavor would be more successful if craftsmanship and craft technology were perceived as a whole consisting of knowledge, skills, technologies, views and beliefs, aesthetics, and values. At the same time we have to keep in mind how lifestyle changes from one generation to the next, and so the approach needs to vary accordingly. This would mean new approaches for attracting the public's attention and, using contemporary methods, offering opportunity for familiarization, training and use of the skills. Lastly, we should keep in focus the role of ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and

mediators of the transmission of knowledge and experience, but also as agents in the cultural field.

Positioning itself in this theoretical framework, the aim of this article is to present and analyze the process of creative traditions and inherited experience exchange among different groups—students and adolescents, design students, people with impaired vision, and artists. In 2019 the non-governmental non-profit organization Stoyna Krastanova Foundation created and implemented the project *Textile and City. A City Lab for Experiments in Textile. Nettle Creations Textile Festival*. A main goal of the project was the safeguarding of textile art and preindustrial experience and knowledge as cultural heritage.[2] The focus was on nettle as an ancient material, used in different textile and cultural practices little known to our contemporaries. Main drivers in the project were also the authors of this text—Krassimira Krastanova, Maria Kissikova, and Elitsa Stoilova—ethnologists familiar with heritage and the features of preindustrial culture, including textile technology, but also cultural policies and mechanisms for transmission and re-thinking of cultural values and traditions today. Combining their scientific expertise with the potential of project culture, the team developed a methodology and actions that would allow for the transmission of scientific knowledge, the presentation and preservation of heritage in a new way, allowing certain knowledge and practices to reach a wider public. Using the title *Textile and City* as a means for presenting and preserving knowledge and abilities acknowledges the potential that project culture has for implementing cultural policies. In this case, our work was directed towards transmission of traditional skills through an experimental approach to placing old textile technologies in a contemporary context. The project provided for the transmission of knowledge of archaic materials in textile crafts, which have a folkloric, mythological, and symbolic value, and whose connection to weaving in the past was extremely strong and defining the choice and application of certain weaving techniques and skills. Our task was to use elements from the intangible cultural heritage and in the context of the project to give an opportunity for experiments and innovation in textile art.

For the implementation of the project, we tried to create a new situation in which to show and tell a story based on folklore and traditional technology to transmit knowledge and skills to young people who would participate in, acquire and experience textile techniques and artistic skills in a new way, using an ancient material, the nettle. What led us to choose the nettle was that even today this plant is replete with practical and symbolic meanings. In terms of embedded project actions, we applied the model of knowledge and skills transmission characteristic of preindustrial societies to new circumstances, using narratives, demonstration, and testing out the technological practices in the context of transmission of experience (learning by doing). Along with the activities in the project, we intended the participation in a particular ritual involving nettle (a nettle "tea ceremony"), fulfilling creative tasks and carrying out artistic projects (learning through experience), displaying the newly acquired skills and the created objects in exhibitions and a festival (experience, celebration of artistic achievements). Achieving those milestones was possible due to the rest of the project activities such as: Creative workshops for presenting nettle as a tangible and intangible heritage (Nettle Anatomy); creative workshops that involved experiments and creativity (Art Labs); traditional and anthropological interpretation of folk tales (Nettle Stories); project results (exhibitions, new rituality, festival). A novel feature was also building connections and relationships between different kinds of public—school children and adolescents, majors in Design and

Fashion from the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, visually impaired people, designers, and artists in the field of textile.[3] Using the work in our cultural project as a case study, we will present the specific approaches used in the project to harness preindustrial knowledge and technological experience as a source of inspiration for contemporary creative work. Applying a case study methodology, we look at creative traditions as a form of transmission, preservation, and usage of intangible cultural heritage and as a process in which knowledge and skills stemming from the past are connected to contemporary creative work. To delineate the similarities and differences between the traditional and the new model and to compare their function is an important problem for us.

Traditional Knowledge and Its Creative Interpretations: Nettle Anatomy Creative Workshop

Perceiving textile through the raw material allows for an appreciation of its qualities. Christel Sola (2015) stresses that this is particularly true for artisans, where every action on the material requires the participation of the body—sensory, emotional, and motor actions. She points out that some of the senses are formed implicitly in the process of mastering the techniques of processing the material, and the way of producing an artifact and the ability to feel the material are inseparable and part of building the collective knowledge and skills needed for production (Sola 2007: 37–50; Sola 2015). In working with textile, the human-matter interaction is complex and involves sensory, aesthetic and technological knowledge and abilities needed to obtain the functional qualities of the produced objects. Furthermore, in preindustrial societies, besides all these crafting conditions, there are also recommendations regarding the choice, use or rejection of a given material, according to its intrinsic qualities, certain notions around it, and the symbolism it carries (Krastanova 2001: 517–526, 2007). In this way it becomes possible for craft technologies and materials to acquire symbolic characteristics and enter into interaction with other sign systems. A very good example of this is the encyclopedic work of Robert J. Forbes *Studies in Ancient Technology*, where the author shows the application of materials and the development of related tools and techniques not only for direct use, but also for their place in religious ceremonies and their role in marking social, religious and power positions (1964: 1–8). The materials, tools and techniques related to their production become part of the symbolic system of a given society and are found in a state of interchangeability with other sign equivalents.

In running the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, we started from this close connection between the feel of a material and the acquiring of technological skills to process textile. We drew on research on the history of technique and cultural technology (Leroi-Gourhan 1965: 9–78; Haudricourt 1987: 37–121; Sahlins 1976), according to which societies construct their own socio-technical system, in which tools, gestures, knowledge, and skills establish specific relations to each other. These relations are at the same time technical and social and reflect the overall level of collective experience. In preparation for the workshop, we studied how nettle was perceived and used in the past, being a part of nature, but also a resource for constructing culture. This research gave us an opportunity to get closer to understanding and arranging the environment people inhabit. In the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, our goal was to show the participants the complex character of nettle, i.e., as textile, food, medicine, and cosmetics, but also its symbolic meanings, knowledge, and experience weaved into

a society's narratives (tales, legends, and myths). The presentation of the rich practical, symbolic and ritual use of nettle was combined with lectures, discussions, and sensory experiences. Participating in the workshop were artists, culture and heritage specialists, students, and interested public.

Evidence of ancient use of nettle is found not only in specialized ethnobotanical and phytopharmaceutical studies, but also in ethnographic research concerned with the history of technology or rituals. Nettle has been, as a material and in use, enmeshed in a net of meanings, integrated in everyday communication, and known in the premodern societies of the Balkans. Today a big proportion of these meaningful connections are missing, and the significance nested in them also lost. It is hard to collect a full corpus of such data, as they are preserved in limited and separate village regions, fragmented and preserved in the memory of predominantly older people. The knowledge and practices related to nettle today belong to cultural heritage, as long as there exists a memory of them.

The work on the Textile and City project gave us an opportunity to revive this knowledge and reveal it to the participants. We applied different forms of experience, which would connect a different audience with nettle as a natural and cultural material—sensory (to see, to touch, to smell the aroma, to taste), educational (various information about the material), creative (artistic experiments, restoration of ancient technologies, innovative works). Applying the "creative traditions" approach allowed us to build a sensitivity towards (nettle as) cultural heritage and to understand its value as a connecting thread to our forebears, and after that to be actively included in "learning by doing" and "experience through art." Here we can mention the work of researchers in the cultural field, which helps to bridge the gap between scientific and everyday knowledge and to apply it in social and creative practice. It allows the audience to come into contact with the cultural heritage, to recognize it as such, and to include it as a symbolic resource in modern activities.

The project is indicative of the potential of the interaction between ethnologists and anthropologists as researchers and cultural workers, on one hand, and artists, on the other, relying on the symbiosis between cultural heritage and its contemporary interpretations in the art field. Three artists were invited as participants in the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop, Laura Dimitrova, Dinka Kassabova, and Tsvetomir Petkov. Our aim was for the results of our research on nettle and the knowledge that we, with our anthropological expertise, presented at the workshop to serve as inspiration to the artists who, on that basis, would make their own works of art. What artists learned was also a driving force for their artistic re-interpretation of the traditional materials, technical and symbolic knowledge. With the means they had at their disposal, they were stimulated to express their creative ideas, thoughts, emotions, feelings and to weave the multilayered nature of nettle into their art works. The original interpretations of the ancient techniques for processing and using nettle presented at the workshop, as well as their mythological and cultural meanings, were displayed during the final project exhibition as part of the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The exhibition was a result of the Nettle Anatomy creative workshop where the diverse cultural, symbolic, technological, gastronomic, medical and culinary uses of nettle were presented to artists and the broader public. That exhibition followed the logic that traditions and heritage are not static. They are re-thought and transformed according to the needs of the contemporary cultural and personal contexts.

We believe that art might be seen as another path to traditional knowledge sustainability (both tangible and intangible). Contemporary art works could enable intangible cultural heritage to keep up with

society by attributing new interpretations and uses to it. In view of this aim, we used the "arts–sustainability–heritage" model that puts the values and actions of creative workers in relation to cultural heritage. Artistic work could be essential for preserving cultural heritage not only by re-interpreting culture, but also by reflecting on the current state of society. The term "creative traditions" coined by Vintilă Mihăilescu is imbued with similar suggestions, making it apparent how artists interact with preindustrial knowledge, not by trying to keep it within a static model, but, instead, by transforming it through their creative interpretations (Mihăilescu 2017: 21). The author stresses the role artists play in renegotiating and reusing heritage by claiming that "modern artists have frequently proceeded in this way, picking up inherited updated versions from 'archaic' societies (their own or 'exotic' ones) and transfiguring them into 'creative' works of art" (Mihăilescu 2017: 22). Mihăilescu also reveals the other agents of this interaction. According to him, not only contemporary artists take part in constructing creative traditions, but also artisans, designers and patrimony specialists (ethnologists and anthropologists), and organizations that are interacting with the creative industries. He concludes that the creative use and interpretation of what is being re-thought as heritage is "neither one-way inspiration nor cut-and-paste fusion, but the shared building of a field of ideas and practices devoted to such a sustainable and meaningful development" (Mihăilescu 2017: 22).

That is why in the context of the project the involvement of modern artists was of utmost importance. Each of the artists we worked with had a different approach, due to the specifics of his or her personal and artistic biography. One of the participants was Laura Dimitrova.[4] Her artistic interpretation, shown in the project's final exhibition, was Beauty Amulets. These were a series of mixed technique panels, the main materials used being nettle and recycled paper. The art work linked her previous works in artistic textile, painting, drawing, paper art with the various cultural contexts of nettle, popularized during the Nettle Anatomy workshop. Through her artistic interpretation, Laura Dimitrova popularizes traditional knowledge and applications of nettle by using art as a mediator. In a video material, a part of the exhibition, she verbally expresses those connections:

> In folk beliefs nettle is a universal apotropaic. In the context of traditions, nettle is useful, medicinal, protective, even when causing pain... Its advantages are many. Are useful things beautiful? ... Is nettle beautiful? ... Actually the adjective "beautiful" is never used for the stinging nettle. The series Beauty Amulets is influenced by the unusual, hardly noticeable beauty of nettle.

The quote allows us to understand the values and actions of creative workers in relation to cultural heritage and sustainability. As Bennett, Reid, and Petocz stress, "the artistic work is essential both for cultural heritage through the work's reference and re-interpretation of culture, and for sustainability as a reflection on the current and future state of society" (2014: 2).

The other two authors who took part of the project, Dinka Kassabova and Tsvetomir Petkov, also showed not only their visual works, but also, in short video materials, revealed more about how their work interprets and weaves together old technique and cultural usage of nettle into something new intended for a modern audience. Dinka Kassabova[5] works with textile and slow fashion and named her work Nettle Anatomy. In the context of the project, she used a textile print technique on a fabric whose smooth and pleasant touch contrasted with the pattern of stinging nettle leaves. Here is how the author herself contextualizes her work and again becomes not only an interpreter, but also a popularizer

as she uses old techniques and knowledge in her work:

> Impressed by this extraordinary plant, I decided to study its structure, to test out some of its properties and to tell about its character through images ... This is how Nettle Anatomy was born—the theme, which I will develop on original fabric, in which I visualize parts of the plant, "play" with its structure and recreate in graphic form the feel of its touch (...) Nettle Anatomy is in a way a research process, which tries to recreate two sides of the nettle "character," its properties and content, which in turn are connected to pain and cure - lightness.[6]

The first two artists see nettle as combining pain and remedy and focus their work on symbolic interpretations of using nettle as a miracle cure. The third artist with whom we worked, Tsvetomir Petkov,[7] offers a different interpretation. Petkov is a fashion designer and owner of the original fashion brand Vezba, where traditional Bulgarian embroidery (*shevitsa*) is interpreted in modern clothes. The work he did for the exhibition, inspired by the Nettle Anatomy workshop, focused on the forgotten and almost extinct application of nettle in fabric production. The artist started from nettle threads to present and experiment with this artisan technology. His story about nettle is a presentation of the technology he tried to reconstruct in the closest possible way to its preindustrial form. Thus the creative interpretation is connected to a return to what is thought as an ancient textile knowledge and practical experience. His presentation is a telling of the steps needed to produce a thread from nettle.

> After nettle picking, it has to be let to dry. After drying up, the leaves are removed ... The dried-up nettle stems are tied in bundles, around twenty or twenty-five stalks each. The next step is about getting the pectin out of the plants (this is the binding agent that would not let us extract a thread). It dissolves in water, but needs time. The tied-up bundles can be placed in a slow flowing water, calm river waters being suitable ... The bundles are taken out of the water and squeezed. After that they are let to dry again. The already dried plants are broken (scutched). The goal is for the fiber to separate from the stem ... To form a good thread, the extracted fiber needs to be heckled with a hackle or with two fine brushes, through which it is pulled. A yarn is then formed from the extracted material, which can then be used for weaving.

Tsvetomir Petkov made various original works from nettle fibers, such as parts of clothes and accessories, others with independent artistic character that he describes as carrying an "ethno" resonance.

A more in-depth analysis of how artists interact with heritage, and their eventual participation in its transmission and interpretation, is possible thanks to the arts-sustainability-heritage method developed by Bennett et al. (2014). The researchers have identified two possible interaction variants: "the value dimension" and "the action dimension." One is referring to the values and symbolic meanings, the other to the work process and use of technological features. What they underline is that artists cannot always see the connection between their artistic work and heritage and sustainable development (Bennett et al. 2014: 5–6). In cases such as the ones presented above, we can see a manifestation of the two approaches to heritage. The works of Laura Dimitrova and Dinka Kassabova approach heritage more interpretatively in the value dimension context, while the interaction of Tsvetomir Petkov illustrates the action dimension. In the context of interpretative uses of heritage in creative work, Bennett et al. claim that "creative work is an expression of a particular worldview, in which the role of the artist is as guardian of cultural heritage and a critic of society's future direction" (2014: 6). Such a particular

Images 3 and 4
Anatomy of Nettle by Dinka Kasabova. Photo credits by the authors.

Images 5 and 6
The Nettle Textile by Tsvetomir Petkov. Photo credits by the authors.

artistic worldview is connected to their creative and personal biography, viewpoints, and understanding of the role art has in interpreting and transmitting heritage. So regardless of the fact that Laura Dimitrova and Dinka Kassabova do not underline their role in popularizing the preindustrial and artisan textile traditions, being art university lecturers, they undoubtedly work hard in that direction. In that way the integration of old techniques and knowledge into art works, but also in the curricula of schools and universities, helps to popularize heritage. They are a great example of the role of the artist as an important figure in the valorization of "traditional" knowledge and practice, reconciling the practice of specific ancient textile techniques with teaching them to students. Their artistic and educational work helps with re-thinking and innovating the use of preindustrial textile technologies.

The work of Tsvetomir Petkov clearly fits in the action dimension context. His work is based on a detailed understanding of nettle fiber and fabric production. The knowledge he acquires while experimenting and learning, and then applies to an art work, shows the potential of this traditional knowledge. Petkov also sends a message with his work, a message that helps to communicate views of nettle as a resource, as knowledge, as offering a multitude of practical usages to the audience.

Connecting creative work with experiment, aesthetics with experience, sensibility with sense, and feeling with knowledge is part of sensory sharing that transforms into meaning sharing (Filiod 2011). In this way each participant, after attending the seminars and workshops, created an artwork that changed the perception of nettle and produced new knowledge about it. All three artists interpreted the collective knowledge from their own aesthetic and artistic viewpoints, so that the art works carried a powerful authorial signature.

Learning by Doing and the Democratization of Cultural Heritage: Art Laboratory Creative Workshop

In the context of valorizing textile knowledge through its presentation as a "creative tradition," we organized different workshops (Art Labs). Those activities followed the Textile and City project's aim to provide a creative environment for understanding, experiencing, and valorizing cultural heritage. In our Art Labs, the focus was learning about nettle use in preindustrial societies by creating a meaningful experience. The main aim was to avoid static modes of learning and to encourage active participation from the learners, as well as to stimulate their own interpretation of the knowledge and technical skills acquired during the workshops. The activities that were held during the project and the Textile Festival were organized following the logic that the future of intangible cultural heritage lies in communicating heritage effectively.

An example of the specifics of what we called an "art laboratory" were the workshops for eco-prints, which involved experiments with the technique and dyeing of fabrics with plant-based materials. They were held once as a standalone event and one more time as part of the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The eco-print workshops were carried out in cooperation with the eco-print designer Dinka Kassabova, who took the role as the expert, passing on her practical knowledge on eco-printing. The participants in the eco-print Art Labs were schoolchildren and Fashion and Design majors. They not only learned about the specifics of the textile use of nettle, but also how to master the eco-printing techniques and dyeing with natural materials in a context of learning by doing. The opportunities of acquiring these sets of preindustrial knowledge and skills were not limited to the use of nettle, but also inspired new creative interpretations

Images 7 and 8
ArtLaboratory Eco-print. Photo credits by the authors.

from the participants themselves. Thus the demonstrated eco-printing techniques with nettle were used on materials other than fabric (such as paper), or with different plants. On the other hand, the participants improvised themselves with nettle and the possibilities of their own artistic interpretations (nettle prints, drawing of nettle leaves, nettle inlays or painting).

We applied the learning by doing approach in the eco-print workshops believing that the best way to transmit tangible and technological knowledge is through experience and, in that particular case, by learning how to use plants for eco-printing. Similar workshops might be offered in order to present the use of nettle as nutrition, cosmetics, medicine, and construction material. This approach stemmed from our conviction of the potential that play and art carry, as for the informal education of a participant, so for the assimilation and valorization as heritage of preindustrial knowledge on extracting nettle fiber, fabric production, or dyeing.

In preindustrial societies, technological knowledge was part of education in culture, establishing gender, age and social differentiations. Knowledge on processing fabrics, manufacturing foods, practicing crafts, as well as medicinal knowledge depended on the geographic position of the settled community and the natural resources it had access to. In premodern societies, technological knowledge and practice were heavily loaded with meaning, because the preindustrial person used the interpretative schemas of religion, mythology, and folklore. These essential features of traditional culture distinguish it from the global, rational, and highly technologized world we live in. Direct "translations" of experience and traditions from these times are impossible due to the differences in the social and interpretative structures. Even while the learning by doing method is a traditional way of transmitting cultural and practical knowledge in the preindustrial society, our workshops serve as an example of how transmitting knowledge can differ today, as well as how that knowledge can be used. In our case, Dinka Kassabova, the expert, became the new mediator, the transmitter of preindustrial knowledge and craftsmanship to the workshop participants. The way in which heritage is popularized today is linked to a certain democratization of knowledge. If we take for example the textile practices and the wider knowledge of nettle usage we introduced through the project activities, we could say that integrated in cultural projects of the sort, local forms of inherited knowledge, practices and techniques of processing specific natural materials

become available to a wider public. The mentor would not have to be from the same local group as the pupil. In the eco-print workshop, textile technologies were taught to a gender- and age-diverse audience. For transmitting intangible cultural heritage, a similar democratization can in some cases have an impact on issues of safeguarding and sustainability. In order to recover the knowledge of preindustrial use of nettle, and present it to a broad auditory, each one of the activities we planned was meant to involve a variety of publics, not limiting the learning experience to children and adolescents but also including adults.

In the context of a democratization of the cultural heritage of forms and its transmission and interpretation, we believe that the artistic re-thinking and re-interpreting of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage is also an important part of its modern existence. The project recognized the key importance of both anthropologists and artists in giving value and creating meaningful transmission experiences for a particular intangible heritage.

Narrative, Storytelling, and Creative Traditions: Nettle Stories Creative Workshop

Homo narrans is a wonderful metaphor, expressing an essential human trait—the ability to construct meaning and transmit meaning through narratives. As Frederick Mayer remarks, storytelling is an immanent dimension of the human situation and societal being. According to Mayer, "our narrative capacity is at the heart of what it means to be human; to be human is to share a common code of narrative" (2015: 67). Roland Barthes stresses that the story is an universal phenomenon, "narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds" (1966: 1–27). Anthropologists and folklorists examine cultural differences in narrative not so much in terms of its presence or absence, as its place and function in a given society and its connection to the mechanisms of memory, reproduction, and creativity (Boyadzhieva 1994: 4–12). And this is where the tale, told in premodern times, comes in becoming an instrument of transmitting knowledge and arguing the necessity of knowledge for humans and their full participation in society.

We turned our attention to the inherited cultural practice of telling folk tales related to the transmission of knowledge and abilities that are part of the cultural technology and social skills. In the Balkan rural culture, for example, technology and weaving skills stand in close relation to the social roles of a woman in preindustrial societies (Kotseva 1994: 33–44; Drettas 1979: 23–37). Transmitted mainly in a family environment and the neighborly community via practical experience and storytelling, the technological knowledge and skills are applied in gender defined groups and are based on the complex acquisition of specialized production experience, which to a large degree carries the characteristics of creative work. The transmission form and process, acquisition and application of the cultural technology of manual production (crafts) are recognized today as cultural heritage, which includes not only the tangible expression of the artisan objects and their practical usage, but also a multitude of intangible characteristics related to them—aesthetic qualities, creative opportunities, artistic imagination, but also values, symbolic meanings, or identity markers.

Meanwhile today different genres of oral culture (folk tales, fables, parables, legends, myths, etc.) are safeguarded as intangible cultural heritage. In premodern and modern societies, narrative have similar

functions and characteristics, in so much as they serve for the transmission of messages in the current social and cultural context. The peculiarity in the contemporary context is that premodern narrative is also studied, analyzed and interpreted by ethnologists and anthropologists. These experts not only know the cultural models of premodern society, where storytelling is a common practice, but also have the ability to transpose and interpret this narrative by reconstructing "imagined pasts" through the traditions—the difference that Mihăilescu makes between customs and traditions is especially relevant here (2017: 12).

In the Textile and City project we developed the Nettle Stories Creative Workshop, which relied on storytelling as a common practice for transmitting cultural knowledge and heritage and built on that by constructing a storytelling event around "A Nettle Tale,"[8] We chose the folk tale as a popular narrative practice in premodern societies, in order to share knowledge of different applications and symbolic meanings of nettle in a contemporary context. The National Storytelling Network defines storytelling as "the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination" (2022). The inclusion of a storytelling event in the project's activities corresponds with Mihăilescu's notion of "creative traditions" as a creative re-thinking of premodern symbols, practices, and rituals in works of art. "'Creative traditions' are trespassing/transgressing classical boundaries of culture and/or heritage" (Mihăilescu 2017: 23), and we, as anthropologists and cultural workers, have the necessary skills to re-think and give value to this heritage by representing it in a new way in the current social context. We chose the storytelling method as part of the project's activities because it allows history to turn into a performance, by enhancing it with interactive elements, sensory challenges, and creative cooperation. During the actual events, storytelling was mixed with games and creativity, and learning with doing.

Developing and running the Nettle Stories workshop included research and creative work. We did research on various cultural knowledge and uses of nettle, as well as folklore aspects of storytelling and heritage transmission. The creative work included developing the main messages, arranging a plot line around them, integrating interactive elements, sensory challenges, and an original story. According to Peterson and Langellier, cooperation between storytellers and audiences is realized due to the potential of both sides to mobilize shared "discursive resources and conventions" (2006: 123), or as Roman Jakobson calls them, "supplies of ready-made patterns" (1976:170). "A Nettle Tale" was built on known folk tale prose narrative models, plot line, and stylistics. The story plot is organized around an existing motif in the Balkan folk tale about a little village and its inhabitants who face a cataclysmic event and are forced to deal with different obstacles until they restore the village and social order. This motif is a local realization of the popular narrative model of rebirth/revival (Mayer 2015: 57–62; TEQ 2018: 17–18). Here we find interwoven many syntactic constructions and stylistic figures that remind of a folklore text (e.g., "Today I will tell you a story…"; "The rain fell and fell and fell… fell for three days and three nights", triple repetitions of simple question-answer dialogues, epithet accumulations, and so on). In constructing the story, we used the familiar narrative tradition, which corresponds to the audience's experience and presents positive expectations, in order to re-create it in a new way in the current context.

We integrated new content into the well-known folk tale form, and did it on two levels. On the surface level, the folk tale placed an accent on the use and application of nettle, and on a deeper level, we planted messages that are important from the

viewpoint of cultural and creative workers and correspond to the current social context, where the storytelling occurs. As noted by Peterson and Langellier, stories are expected to be about something, to have a point worth telling (2006: 127). What do we actually want to tell with this story? Which are the things "worth telling"? The main messages we coded into the folk tale relate to the significance of shared communal living (togetherness), the role of the knowledgeable and skillful person (expertise), and the focus on the creative beginning. The idea of the significance of shared communal living is advanced in the story in a few ways. On one hand, by stressing the communal efforts instead of individual characters (the heroes are more like types). On the other hand, through the repeated affirmation of sharing—to have for oneself, but also for the others: "I took all the bread I could carry so that I could eat, when I was hungry, and give to the others, who became hungry on the road." Underlining the role of the knowledgeable and skillful person was another important message we placed in the folk tale, realized mainly through the image of "the master." The master in our plot is the one who has at their disposal the necessary knowledge and skills to use nettle, but also to repair the ripped social fabric after the cataclysm. The significance of creativity and the creative beginning reflects the third message we integrated in the folktale. The idea of creativity was illustrated in several ways. On one hand, through the artist's image—one of the character types in the folk tale, who in fleeing the flooded village took their violin. "And my violin is magical, when I touch its strings, it will remind me of our precious home in the valley and will bring you solace even on the most difficult days." On the other hand, by highlighting the role of imagination in (re)discovering new uses of nettle ("But there were people who wanted to invent new things and experiment") and by stimulating the listener's imagination. While in premodern societies folk tales (as part of the communal narrative tradition) are used to transmit cultural meanings and moral messages, the contemporary reconfiguration of the folk tale as an element of creative traditions loads it with ideas and messages that correspond to the current social processes and postmodern audiences.

The last step in constructing the storytelling event was the integration of interactive, sensory and creative elements in it. The French anthropologist François Laplatine turns our attention to the fluid character of sensibility, which defines its ability to penetrate and take part in the social life, and this makes the author wary of drawing a firm line between sense and sensibility (2005: 185–249). Stimulating the senses of the audience engages their perception, interest, and memory long-term and influences the experience of and participation in an event (Johnsson 2006; TEQ 2018). Guided by these principles, we added three types of elements that supplemented and enhanced storytelling event "The Nettle Story": sensory impacts, interactive challenges, and creativity. On one hand, we included stimuli that would engage the senses in constructing a situation or scene in the folk tale, the setting (such as sounds of birds, domesticated animals, children playing, pouring rain, or water spray). On the other, we also used stimuli that related to a certain moment in the plot or were connected to a certain character and involved audience participation[9] (they shared a glass of water, piece of bread and nettle tea, when the protagonists of the folk tale found a safe harbor after the flood, thus stimulating the taste receptors, touch, and smell). Another way to actively engage the audience was by involving them in contributing to and finishing the story, which gave them a chance to empathize, experience, and co-create the folk tale. Their interactive co-operation enabled us to stress further the message of togetherness integrated in the folktale. The creative elements in the storytelling event corresponded with our emphasis on creativity and took the form

Images 9, 10 and 11
The Tale of the Nettle Storytelling event.
Photo credits by the authors.

of the call to action at the end of the folk tale to create nettle inspired art. The event attendees were encouraged to participate in creative workshops, use various materials, techniques, and technologies, such as working with paint and clay, dyeing textile with natural dyes, and more. The applied techniques of participant engagement in the storytelling event turned storytelling into performance, in which storyteller and audience can change places. This allowed for a rich variability of the event, which was guided by the given participants and the context that was constructed every time in a new way according to the contact and communication situation.

The potential of the storytelling event to achieve the set goals is also determined by the configuring of the event according to the intended audience. As Emily Johnsson notes, "each telling of a story is uniquely re-created for each fresh audience" (2006: 3). We organized the event twice with a young audience and twice more with a diverse audience. For each of the events we created a specific, concrete, situational communication to enable the involvement of all participants in creating and thinking through what was happening. With the help of the National Blind Rehabilitation Center in Plovdiv we organized the Nettle Stories creative workshop with visually impaired participants. The event was adapted by focusing the sensory experiences towards hearing, taste, and touch, and the creative workshop was geared towards plastic arts (clay work). This built on top of what we had learned in previous iterations of the event and produced valuable results.

The last storytelling event held happened during a science conference that brought together ethnologists, folklorists, anthropologists (experts in storytelling and the scientific study of narratives), in order to show the method's potential. In this specific situation the interactive and creative elements were removed, and the event focused on storytelling and collective experience. Despite removing a large part of the elements stimulating involvement, the audience demonstrated active engagement in (co)telling and (co)creating the story. A further development of the storytelling event could include different interactive, sensory and creative elements in accordance to the specifics of the given audience.

The Nettle Stories creative workshop draws on the narrative traditions in Balkan premodern societies in order to construct an interactive and creative event based on storytelling. Our work in the project was consistent with our expertise as ethnologists and cultural workers, but also closely connected to Mihăilescu's idea of "creative traditions," which implied a re-thinking of folklore knowledge and practice in new creative forms. Thus the folk tale as a well-known narrative convention was reconfigured through a storytelling event. Via "The Nettle Story" we shared somewhat forgotten knowledge about nettle use, conveying messages and ideas tailored to the current social context, and provoked creative cooperation. The project allowed us to innovate the traditional narrative form, to place a new emphasis on the forgotten cultural knowledge of nettle (valorization), and to create an experience engaging the senses and the imagination.

The Creation of Meaningful Transmission Experiences and the New Rituality: Nettle Creations Textile Festival

The project's last stage was the Nettle Creations Textile Festival. The transmission of knowledge and skills within the community, as well as the declaration of a specific heritage and cultural identity, often happen via collective celebration. This is why the festival format was also included as one of the possible ways to popularize nettle knowledge and transmit it to a wider

audience, since within the festival there is ample opportunity to demonstrate the connections between art (visual, digital, fine, music), textile, cuisine, fashion, ethnomedicine, and others. The highlight was the feast celebrating the knowledge and creative skills for creating art works from nettle. During the festival the Nettle Creations exhibition was opened, where Laura Dimitrova, Dinka Kassabova and Tsvetomir Petkov showed their original works inspired by nettle. Along with that, the works created by participants in creative workshops were also displayed in parallel exhibitions, showing the great potential of a modern reading of preindustrial technologies and folklore knowledge. The Art Labs and the storytelling event were adapted to the festival format, as one more effort to present and popularize nettle in its various contexts, in front of an audience that interacts with the given knowledge and has a tactile and emic experience.

Just for the festival we developed a new interactive event that would capture the ritual specifics as a communal experience and interpret it as a creative tradition in the current social context, Nettle Tea Ceremony. According to Jan Assmann rituals are "a form of preserving and reproducing of cultural meaning" (2001: 20); they are an expression of a communal interaction and have an important role for cementing the communal identity in time. The ritual action is repetitive, it carries a certain cultural knowledge and in this way contributes to the reproduction of cultural identity (Assmann 2001: 55). Setting up the nettle tea ceremony in the context of the festival again aimed for an innovative interpretation of shared meals, building on elements already integrated in the preceding events and creative workshops—all our meetings included drinking nettle tea, sharing bread or nettle *banitza* (a traditional pastry dish). Such ceremonies involving nettle tea are not abundant in the Bulgarian cultural context, but preparing a hot drink from various herbs and plants is a common practice.

The ceremony was characterized by its emphatically ritualized nature with an internal repetitiveness, cultural meaning-making, and the interactive participation of all attendees. The main highlight were the senses as means to get to know the environment, which engages considerable rational and emotional resources of the individual and enhances memory (TEQ 2018: 20). The participants in the ceremony were arranged in a circle and the host prepared them for the shared sensory experience that awaited them. The ritual action sequentially unlocked different senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste), presented challenges, raised questions. Guided by the instructions of the ritual master, the participants perceived the nettle tea with their various senses, interpreted their sensations, shared associations and memories, and constructed a new sensory experience and cultural meaning.

The nettle tea ceremony was developed with the goal of covering all different aspects of transmitting cultural knowledge and cultural heritage known to preindustrial societies (via speech, action, and objects). It relied on a sensory connection not only as a means for creating a memorable experience, but also as a specific way of perceiving the environment. The shared drinking of tea and telling of stories by every participant in the ceremony underlined the crucial part of every ritual to sustain the community and its cultural identity.

All these different activities organized during the project were presented in the context of the festival and helped showcase the diverse knowledge and uses of nettle. We used different forms of communication and learning such as lecture, discussion, art experimentation, tasting food products, storytelling, and other. The aim was to valorize nettle as a significant part of both traditional and modern culture by identifying preindustrial and craftsmanship nettle textile technologies as cultural heritage. This

was not meant to be a one way process, but rather as a creative and liberal process where participants might attribute multiple values. Following the heritage specialist Donna Mitchenson's assumption (2015) that the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is closely related to the creation of meaningful transmission experiences, we believe all activities mentioned above are working in that direction. Moreover workshops and festivals enable both organizers and participants to establish their personal meaningful transmission experiences that (re)connect them to the traditional practices and knowledge about nettle.

The forms chosen to represent heritage and include participants in the festival activities echoed the context set by Mitchenson (2015), who stresses that providing meaning, interpretation and use relevant to modernity and modern persons is essential for understanding and transmitting heritage. According to Mitchenson, in many cases where heritage is represented, the forms chosen do not meet the needs and understanding of the modern person, which leads to further incomprehension and breaking with a lot of knowledge and practice from the past. During the festival, as well as during the preceding workshops and discussions, we established interpretative spaces, where the participants had the freedom to find their own way to the nettle and its traditional technological, cultural and symbolic uses in preindustrial societies. The creative workshops and festival activities were a way to build a cultural connection between participants and the promoted cultural practices.

In creating this kind of symbolically and emotionally laden experience, which can help heritage valorization and transmission, an important role is played by people working with art, anthropologists, and ethnologists, i.e. artistic and cultural workers. While the artists creatively interpret heritage or are themselves carriers of knowledge and practical experience, which is part of their creative techniques, the anthropologists and ethnologists, regardless of their high level of knowledge in the social and cultural fields, rarely practice the heritage that is the subject of their scientific research. Heritage specialists see cultural heritage transmission as an ongoing process between different generations within a community, where knowledge and skills necessary for the normal functioning of society and each of its members are transmitted with different means. The joint work of artistic and cultural workers could be beneficial not only for re-thinking and valorizing old knowledge and practices as heritage, but also for stimulating their transmission and re-interpretation.

Including various publics in practicing different cultural forms and technological activities, which would be the basis for adoption, preservation and practice of heritage, was key to every activity in the project, as well as to the different workshops, demonstrations, and activities included in the festival program. A good example of that is the Nettle Stories event during the festival, where a main aim was to elicit a proactive attitude from the participants, who would not only absorb, but also play a part in the construction of the event and its cultural meanings. Besides the activities that stimulated the audience's participation, the festival presented a context, with different exhibitions displaying a number of art objects, the results of the series of creative workshops. During the festival, they were not only given a new use as exhibition artifacts, but also elicited memories, emotions, associations for both participants and the festival visitors. The syncretistic nature of the process of transmission was integrated in the different project workshops, so that the cultural knowledge could be presented through telling, action, imitation, sensory involvement, creativity, and the participants could experience the process of knowledge transmission and sharing experience.

Re-thinking Cultural Heritage and New Applications

Developing the project Textile and City. A City Lab for Experiments in Textile. Nettle Creations Textile Festival offered us an opportunity to analyze the functioning of the cultural technology in two different contexts, the preindustrial society and a contemporary setting. In the preindustrial society, cultural technologies were a means to develop the national art culture as a system, as part of the sociological structure, and to express practical, symbolic, and conceptual meanings. Preindustrial cultural technologies were a functional and instructive element of the economic and social cycle of a rural community, and they provided an emotional-artistic connection of the collective by regulating its existence (Zhivkov 1977: 9–37). The technological knowledge and skills were acquired within the family or a specialized craft community through informal practical education. The participation in production played an important role, while being supported by the syncretic nature of culture. Participation enabled the transmission of the same skill and experience, expressed through the possibilities of language and speech, ritual, and the festive system (in particular the rites of passage according to van Gennep). The symbolic and practical aspects are equally significant and have a decisive importance in asserting what Mihăilescu calls "retrospective rationality" (2016: 11). In modern times, the situation looks quite different, because our society has long since freed itself from the social and economic constraints of premodern life, and relationships are highly individualized (see Table 1).

Yet the notion of cultural heritage as a foundation and legitimation of relationships in a given community (Pomian 2010: 45–56; Thiese 1999–2001: 163–261) prompts

	Preindustrial society	Contemporary situation
Technology and product adoption and implementation	A cultural reality Production activity	Cultural heritage and creative transformation
Training and transmission of knowledge and skills	Practicing knowledge in the family, intergenerational transmission across genders	Experiment within a project, transmission of knowledge from specialists (scientists, artists) to different groups
Form of transmission	Informal learning and acquisition of knowledge, skills and values through participation in production, rituals, storytelling	Planned education with clear pedagogical methods, storytelling, creative process, play and experience
Relationship between the technological knowledge and experience with the social environment	Transmission of traditional values and social norms aiming to (re)produce the social fabric and relations	Embodied values, integrated lessons, and messages are tailored to the contemporary situation.

Table 1. Models of transmission of cultural traditions and cultural heritage

people to look for their roots in the past. If we accept Tornatore's brief definition of heritage as an "object of attachment, a connection, constructed and realized in or through the material expressions of the past" (2011: 75–91), we have to turn our attention to the fact that the community itself has to value and accept material expressions of the past as witnesses of time and to affirm their significance. This is a shared collective activity that is subject to constant negotiation, choosing solutions among multiple possible answers.

This is not just about the identity-oriented inherited culture, but rather about its actual existence and meaning in real life, more precisely those possibilities that traditions have for representing and dealing with the past (Mihăilescu 2016: 13). European cultural policies do play a role in activating traditions, as they are aimed at the use of cultural heritage and traditions for the development of creative industries. Cultural heritage itself is presented as part of cultural and creative industries, but also as a resource for the sustainable development of communities and territories (Capello et al. 2020: 11–19). However, it is more interesting to look at the very process of their interpretation, acceptance, and application in modern life. This is exactly what we tried to do in this project—to build an experimental space where we can introduce a different type of audience to the complex nature of heritage and see its interpretations, according to the group and individual characteristics of the participants.

The project went through several stages, in which different types of activities were implemented, each of them aiming to present and convey different elements of the cultural heritage embodied in the processing and uses of the nettle. Its realization showed that these processes can be strengthened and developed even more if artists as creative workers cooperate with ethnologists and anthropologists as cultural workers. Ethnologists, anthropologists and specialists in the field of culture and heritage know traditional culture theoretically and in a static version. They can help valorize preindustrial knowledge and practices as cultural values and heritage. The innovative and creative interpretation of this knowledge and experience by artists (artists, visual artists, modelers, designers, and others) breathes life into new applications and uses of traditions. Close cooperation between artistic and cultural workers supports acknowledging, re-thinking and reinstating of the value of nettle as cultural heritage, as well as the specific use of ancient knowledge and practices in a modern context. It is such an interaction, we believe, that can be the basis of sustainability in managing the legacy of a given tangible or intangible cultural heritage and its creative transformation.

NOTES

1. "Belt weaving" is an ancient technique for handcrafting belts. It involves small wooden or leather tiles, which are used for shaping the base. The yarn is weaved in with a wooden knife (Krastanova 2007).

2. The Stoyna Krastanova Foundation Project Textile and City was funded by the Plovdiv Municipality Programme to be included in the city's Cultural Calendar. The project was carried out in 2019 in Plovdiv with the participation of ethnologists and anthropologists (also the authors of this article), artists, and students. All activities were free and open to the public. They were attended not only by young people, school children, and students, but also by business people and people interested in cultural heritage and contemporary art. This article includes our reflections on our work as ethnologists, anthropologists, and cultural workers.

3. All activities in the project were carried out in Plovdiv's Old Town (http://oldplovdiv.bg/en/), which was named an architectural-historical reserve of national importance in 1956. The Creative workshops, Art Labs and Festival activities were concentrated in houses with Revival architecture, which are listed as national immovable cultural

heritage. Their remarkable atmosphere encourages an emotional attitude towards urban spaces and the activities carried out there. Only the work with visually impaired people required that our meetings be held in the National Blind Rehabilitation Center Plovdiv.

4. University professor Laura Dimitrova is a specialist in Decorative Arts and Combinatorics and Theory of the Artistic Image.

5. Dinka Kassabova is a university professor in fashion design and an experienced designer by herself. She dedicated her work to slow fashion and eco print.

6. The Bulgarian word *lek* is a homonym, having two different meanings: (1) lightness, i.e., an object that is not heavy; and (2) medicine or cure. Dinka Kassabova plays with the two meanings of the word.

7. Tsvetomir Petkov is a fashion designer and owner of his own fashion brand *Vezba*, in which Bulgarian needlework is interpreted in modern clothes.

8. We owe gratitude to Magda Raluca Oprea-Minoiu, expert at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, for the inspiring discussions on storytelling and here ideas regarding the nettle fairy tales.

9. The settings, the plot and the characters are basic elements of each story; see more in McAdams (1993: 25-6).

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Embroidery with a Cause: Ten-year Anniversary of *Semne Cusute* [Sewn Signs]

Ioana Corduneanu
Sewn Signs Association, Romania
semnexcusute@gmail.com; www.semnecusute.com

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ABSTRACT

The article is presenting the art project *Semne cusute* [Sewn Signs], focusing on on traditional embroidery's patterns' revival, and launched in 2012. It has already reached a community of 44,000 members. It is an enterprise that brings together cultural and artistic actions, embedded as heritage project. During all these years *Semne cusute's* activity has been presented to the public by means of exhibitions, and educational workshops. The members of the community embroider to emphasize the need to preserve and teach ancient symbols, but also to coin their country (Romania) on the international map of luxury embroidery, responsible fashion, and European heritage.

KEYWORDS

Embroidery; tradition; cultural heritage; Romania; cultural project.

We, the 44,000 members of the online community *Semne Cusute* [Sewn Signs], embroider because we have a goal, along with the strategy to achieve it. We do not embroider to pass the time, or to adorn ourselves. It is not a side hustle or a way to get some extra spending money. Nor is it simply to follow some old customs. Our work serves a different purpose. We are aware of the critical direction our world is spinning towards and we oppose its wasteful trends, researching and proposing alternatives. After all, our activity could be described as a balanced and sustainable form of activism, inspired by tradition.

We embroider together, forming a strong community. We are united by shared values and empowered by our differences. The internet helps us organize towards a common goal.

The *Sewn Signs* project was initially launched in 2012. I was responsible for vectorizing over 2,000 heritage symbols and embroidery patterns for traditional blouses. The decision to upload them on the archival blog *Sewn Signs* came as a natural next step, as I wished to translate these patterns for a new, digital generation. Ten years have passed since I took this leap of faith, unaware of the impact it would soon have. I am grateful for all the people who have supported this project, helping me write the first chapter of our story.

The Romanian Peasant Museum truly witnessed the most important milestones of our story. It was a source of inspiration, as its permanent exhibit was always my refuge when I needed to explore another world. It was a place for research, not only through its library, but all the more through its events and antique fairs. Here in the Museum's courtyard, I was able to feel, photograph, and measure thousands of old blouses, so diverse and unique, often very different from those featured to impress the general public.

Walking among the Museum's flea-market stalls was like entering a time machine, traveling to dozens of villages at any point in time—any researcher's dream. The subject I needed to focus on was right there. At the old Peasant's Club Cafe, I

spent hundreds of hours discussing with extremely passionate and competent people, like Horațiu Silviu Ilea,[1] who taught me so many things. The Club was where I worked on my embroidery and nurtured close friendships with the first women who joined my embroidery community. It was there where I taught the first official workshop for beginners, "The *Ie*[2] School," in 2017. Some of our highest achievements were displayed in numerous exhibitions in the Museum's halls. For Sewn Signs, the Romanian Peasant Museum is a guardian, keeping safe the most beautiful and valuable treasures we have, heritage textiles. Especially the sample collection, which served as a constant guide for everything we have built.

In some ways, we owe the birth of the Sewn Signs project in all of its complexity to the values displayed by the Romanian Peasant Museum. I am an architect by profession, and I have specialized in a successful career of retail design, a niche which connects marketing, branding, merchandising, visual communication, and architecture. I was trained to be able to create a viable commercial space, using assets from all of these fields. That is why I recognize the same values spread throughout the museum. I have "bought" each object that they have displayed, understanding that this museum is a store that sells ideas. Contrary to what many may believe, these objects are not dead. They are frozen in time, waiting for someone to bring them back to life. Ideas live in the forms of objects. When you buy or embrace an idea, you start to understand it, carry it with you, and can materialize it any time, in its old form or as an entirely new concept.

The most important step in our exploratory journey as Sewn Signs is, in my opinion, the transformation of intangible cultural heritage into objects we can wear, wash, gift, sell, and exhibit. This is the stage where any project could fail or fast-track to success, as there is an abundance of ideas, but not all of them can evolve beyond that.

In itself, Sewn Signs has inspired others and may serve as a point of reference for many creators in the future. We are happy to receive international recognition and acclaim. Knowing what may have helped me in the beginning, I will use this opportunity to document the experience I have gained in this project. Perhaps it will be needed a hundred years from now, in 2112, or 2122.

Each rebirth is, of course, in its own form adapted to our modern world, with all the realities and challenges it brings. We do not know what the main communication platform will be a hundred years from now, for all we know the internet will be a mere relic of the past. We cannot know if there will still be needles, or even hemp or cotton. But I learned that each crumb of wisdom from the past can be a great tool.

At first glance, it might seem impossible for a beginner to enter the universe of the detailed techniques we use to create our shirts. Specific cuts, fabric lengths, adjustable elements, *pave,*[3] *clini,*[4] *fodori,*[5] binding and stitching and a whole new language to describe embroidery and hemming techniques—*șinătău,*[6] *brezărău,*[7] *butuci,*[8] *gura păpușii,*[9] *la fir,*[10] and so on.

But all of this is only the beginning, and perhaps the easier part of our mission. The number of angles at which you can pierce the fabric with the needle are, after all, limited by the very structure of the fabric. One must repeat hundreds or even thousands of little stitches. In a more fortunate scenario, you can optimize the steps of your embroidering, to cover more ground in an organized way and use materials more efficiently.

For someone who already knows the way of the needle and understands its techniques, the structure of the fabric and how it dictates embroidery become obvious. To be even more precise, we can understand how a certain type of thread, with a specific texture and structure, requires its own technique.

The natural properties of the fiber along with the way it has been processed determine exactly how it will perform when embroidered, a process determined by many forces: friction, twisting, crossing, and bending. We admire the results. But the

process itself deserves just as much admiration, as the hands work to tame the fabric. The materials we choose to use can make a considerable difference. Throughout our efforts to save the intangible cultural heritage, the biggest challenge was, ironically, very much connected to everything that is tangible.

In the beginning, in 2013 and 2014, when we were still a small group, we put our faith in the old fabrics which were being sold at the Peasant Museum's fair. Auntie Dida, a wise and well-respected seller, would keep the best fabrics under her table, knowing what types of products I liked. On Fridays I would visit her stall and buy all of the carefully curated suggestions, so I could later share them with my embroidery colleagues. Sometimes I would also buy from women who came all the way from Bucovina. First, I would check to make sure it was not "baked," meaning easily tearable, nor too dense, so that we could embroider through its threads.

In these moments, none of us imagined that we may one day require an industrial quantity of fabric, produced on such a large scale. We never thought that we might become the target customer base for certain producers. Meanwhile, offers of hand-made fabric started popping up, but we could never rely on them, as they used the same generic cotton threads and waiting times were too discouraging, as it could take months. It became clear this was not the right solution for us, and the lack of good quality fabric held us back.

In 2015, all I managed to outsource from a few regular factories were fabric samples made out of gauze type cotton, not much different from already existing products. These were the same lower quality fabrics used for etno mass production. Nobody wanted to experiment and develop something new. None of them considered it a lucrative business since, "nobody embroiders for artistry and craftsmanship" as one factory director put it.

Meanwhile, I knew that we would need much higher quality products, with better fibers made out of linen and hemp, but I could not justify this choice to the public, nor to the producers. For them, the only relevant metric was money. The turning point came in December, 2016.

That was when, for the first time ever, a museum would house one of our exhibitions. It was the Peasant Museum indeed. *Ia Aidoma*,[11] our effort to replicate impressive antique blouses from all the large museums of the world, finally caught the eye of specialists. The results were displayed in an exhibition that traveled to be admired in many cities in Romania: Iași, Suceava, Botoșani, Târgu Mureș, Sibiu, Miercurea Ciuc, and abroad: Zaragoza, Geneva, Luxembourg. Shortly after, I was granted access into the Museum's archives, to study the Sample Collection: the oldest and most sought after textile fragments, which we had dreamed of.

Wearing gloves and proceeding with great care, I was able to touch, for the first time, fragments of old and extremely old fabrics. I understood that we needed fabric that not only looked different, but one that would function differently as well. It needed to fall and fold a certain way, like the gentle stream of a river. It needed to vibrate and support some pretty heavy embroidery, rich and dense, crafted with chunky threads.

Still, I was not sure how I could convince members of our group to switch to such an alternative. How could I tell them to abandon the dainty fabric they nicknamed *borangic* [silk], though it was only a cheap substitute, to give up looking for *marchizet* [marquisette]?

In January 2017, I founded the School of *Ie*,[12] here at the Museum, hosted by the welcoming Peasant's Club. Immediately after I made the announcement, in less than 24 hours all the tickets were sold. The course was fully booked, and we even had women who were willing to go on the waiting list for the next workshop. I began preparing the gauze-like cotton samples for their classes, knowing they would be more familiar, and everyone would be already used to them.

But during class, I noticed a contrast that shocked me. The cheap "melted" cotton looked completely out of place in their hands. These first students were women who paid high attention to details and had high standards. The cotton issue kept bothering me and I could not leave it alone, thinking it would be such a shame.

With some money that I had saved up, which was the ultimate decision-making tool for production as I had learned, I traveled to a new factory. Mr. Paul Vasile at PRODIN[13] listened to my arguments, with a lot of patience but not without some doubt. The special moment, which made all the difference, was when I told him, from a 2.5-meter distance, that the sample being shown was too dense for embroidery at 20x20 threads per cm, and that we would need 18 threads per cm. He stopped and looked right at me, double checking the fabric density with a magnifying glass and succinctly concluded: "Miss, I will produce anything you want." I kindly asked for linen, the best one. Should it be blended with cotton to make it cheaper? I said no, the best and purest linen. This was and continues to be the differentiator which sets *Sewn Signs* apart. Not the cheapest, but the best quality, even if it requires more effort.

We started with two types of fabric, a cotton one in a natural shade, 16x16 thread count, and a linen one, weaved with French threads, 18x18 density. These were the first products available in the newly opened Sewn Signs online store.

The novelty was received, in general, with trust and openness. In 2018 we developed the first 100% hemp fabric, specially crafted for shirts and inspired by a fragment found in Sibiu's ASTRA Museum.[14] A work shirt from the Gorj region, in Southern Romania. Many new variations followed, crafted specifically for historical accuracy or different areas and different types of shirts—for celebrations, work, or daily activities.

Already this idea in itself was like a small revolution among all embroidery communities. There were many people with a certain preference and influence who could not go beyond the pattern of an *altiță*[15] shirt, with *încreț*[16] and *râuri.*[17] They were quite in denial, and against all evidence refused to believe that for regular working days women wore simpler shirts, with little to no embroidery. Minimalist shirts, as we would describe them today. We nicknamed them "urban," as they are also easy to integrate into modern outfits, even office ones.

While traditional through their cut and materials, they did not scream etno and thus immediately gained appreciation from people living in larger cities. Hundreds of beginners built up the courage and determination to start embroidering their first shirts. Ones that could be worn without the fear of putting them in the washing machine or styling them with jeans, even if it was not for a special occasion.

More and more people started to understand and appreciate the idea of making their own shirts, in which they could invest more than time, but also natural, high-quality materials, with numerous benefits for themselves and the planet. Hemp fabric brought a wave of change in our wardrobes and mentalities.

In 2020, we stopped all production of 100% cotton fabric. We kept some threads for blends, such as the house blend of cotton and hemp called *Acasă* [Home], and the one blended with linen. The product names for our fabrics are uniquely chosen, setting them apart from the usual girl and flower names. Instead, they are named after certain emotions and impressions stirred by their textures. We have: Fine and Very fine linen, Infinite, Content, Little linen, Sunday, Vintage, Vintage plus, and Incredible. Hemp comes in three options: The first hemp, often used by beginners, Rustic, and Urban. Another new and perhaps a bit confusing product was the Nature fabric, which we purposely kept natural, unbleached.

A lot of people were instantly supportive, very interested in the natural aspect, raw fibers weaved without any chemical treatment. Especially since fabric naturally

lightens over time with each wash, and even with sun exposure. Other clients, mainly from Eastern Romania, Moldova and Republic of Moldova showed a definite preference for white, thinner fabrics, considering it esthetically superior.

We also enjoyed surprising our customers with fabric industrially produced from threads of varying diameters. These threads are included in the final product on purpose to create texture and a "dramatic" effect, especially when it comes to linen. It is a common procedure among those who want to enhance the raw and natural aspects of the fiber, anywhere across the world.

Even more so, in India, known for its cotton production, this method was introduced to somewhat deceive buyers and clients to whom they export about the exact contents of the fabric. This fabric called "linen-cotton" only imitates the natural texture of linen, but in reality, it is made out of 100% cotton. Even the concept of natural fabric is very sought after right now. But how was this new product received by our community?

The same people who appreciated natural, unbleached colors immediately appreciated the uneven texture. They understood that these intentional imperfections created in the industrial process bring a good vibration to their project, and they started embroidering, not minding or even celebrating the unevenness. Thus, we started having shirts that appeared to be made on 100% handcrafted fabric.

But even so, there are still people who label these threads as "defective," without knowing anything about them or bothering to ask. For them, there is only one vision: the perfection of these shirts depends on their steady and even embroidery, which could only be achieved through a uniform thread, on a perfectly uniform fabric.

The danger of having perfection as our single and utmost goal can be observed in people who cannot manage to detach themselves from only seeing what is right in front of their needle. The idea of harmonious coloring, a balanced composition adapted to match the embroidery pattern, the geographical region, and one's own body shape seemed like a foreign principle, in a foreign language. It did not matter if we tried to explain. Sometimes the lack of education or openness makes people less likely to understand that beauty and the perfection of your craft are not one and the same thing. Our best argument was to explain that embroidering machines are the only ones who can produce perfect work, better than any human hand, while also eliminating any type of real emotion.

However, the most active members in our community were more interested in the adventure, the opportunity to experiment as much as possible: with cutting patterns, techniques, new embroidery patterns, and exquisite materials. They savored it and found joy in discovery and learning new things. Their interest, their enthusiasm and their results were our driving force. Their mindset was different, oriented towards progress, without the fear of making mistakes, knowing they will find a solution to fix problems that might arise, willing to learn and be enriched by new experiences. Each new product, each new texture was met with trust (as they knew I had tested it beforehand) and curiosity.

These women quickly understood that what makes the Romanian blouse a visual delight is its diversity. They learned to mix and match, to add surprising details, suspense, a dash of contrast, combining techniques and textures to impress any viewer, but also to enjoy the whole creative process. Indeed, monotony brings a certain calmness, but breaking away from it in a masterful way comes as a breath of fresh air, as these contrasts can power your craft and guide your artistry. And so, we finally managed to leave behind the bland cotton threads marketed as moulinet or cotton perlée, which we now solely use in places where the embroidery is more vulnerable to daily wear: the collar, the binding and sometimes the extra lace-like decoration.

Nowadays we work with wool threads that come in special blends for extra durability: wool and silk, wool and hemp, wool with silk and modal. We also use a very fine type of wool, well spun and combined with acrylics, for small colorful details. There are also linen threads for embroidery. But the most impressive visual effect is brought on by silk, which we use in different forms.

Initially, in Romania you could only buy small five-meter packets of silk, individually wrapped. But a celebration shirt from the south of our country requires more than a kilometer of thread. That would amount to 200 small silk packets, which meant paying more for the packaging than for the silk itself. These logistics were discouraging, and we weren't willing to pay for something so ineffective. What everyone mistakenly called "silk" was a viscose thread produced at Bicaz or over in neighboring Bulgaria.

At last, in February 2018 I found the perfect thread. I was in Luxemburg, for the *Ia Aidoma* exhibit hosted by the Court of Justice of the European Union. I walked into a sewing supply shop unlike any I had ever seen in Romania. Luckily, I had seen such threads on our older shirts, from 200 years ago, the ones kept in the Sample Collection of the Romanian Peasant Museum Archives. Without them, I would not have been able to recognize the thread and be aware of its value. We are talking spools of silk with combed thread, not spun, 800 meters in length, weighing 100 gr, the perfect amount for a beautiful celebration shirt.

Surely, this texture surprised our community, and the reactions were split as per usual. Some members considered it to be faulty, but it turned out that they just could not master how to use it. Others, on the other hand, trusted the new product as the authentic thing and had the strength to try it out, to find methods to adapt using already known techniques. It was only thanks to them, and with their help, that we managed to go forward. The most admirable value of this community is without a doubt the

ambition to never give up, especially not at the first obstacle. There are always women who believe and trust, quickly coming in to show others how they overcame their challenges.

Learning to master the thread meant learning how to make it truly shine. The old principle will always remain true: the material dictates the technique. It tells us how to work with it. Interestingly, even after 150 years, we can obtain similar embroidery results by using the same type of thread they had back then. Thus, we started understanding the work, not content to merely recreate it, but finally understanding the rhythm and angles of embroidery, niche details we were not ready to fully master previously.

What was the first innovation that silk brought us? Color! Color as a spectacle, as color never stands on its own. As usual, within the production chain, profit is the most important aspect, and if you want to obtain something that is exclusive, you have to be able to convince those in charge of its selling potential. Put the money on the table, as we say. For luxury producers who care about their image, knowing the true value of their brand, profit is not always the first priority.

Mr. Klemens Zitron, the owner and leader of the Atelier Zitron[18] factory, a well-known silk producer, accepted to work with us. Exclusively for us, he decided to create a product with a unique color, the one I sent to him as a homemade hand-dyed sample. We named it *Dor*, a more or less untranslatable Romanian word which means longing—a completely unique shade of indigo. Four shades of red followed right away: *Drag* [dear] (a rosy red), *Ardoare* [ardor] (blood red), *Pasiune* [passion] (the red of sour cherries), and *Mândrie* [pride] (a deep purple). They sold off like fresh bread internationally, and thus we next collaborated on a wheat field yellow and a silvery cloudy blue called *Nor* [cloud]. Six complex gradients followed.

For those who do not know silk, how it works and behaves on fabric, this might not seem impressive. Only those who have experimented, dyeing and testing many samples and different types of silk will know what a challenge it can be. Silk thread is more resistant to dyeing than wool is, it absorbs color differently, in a paler shade. In order to obtain deeper and more intense hues a lot more pigment is needed, sometimes in excess. It is then no wonder that such threads bleed out when washed, even in cold water. Deep reds, dark blues and emerald greens are especially problematic. They need a special chemical treatment to stabilize the color, and thus our beautiful silk has a lot of chemistry behind its "new" traditional dyeing process.

In the past, Romanian embroidery was created with shades of silk that were to some extent borrowed from other cultures, people passing through our country or occupying it. But we have now reached another important milestone. We work with unique colors that we created and asked for and will, in the future, raise many questions: Where did they even find such silk? Who produced it? How did they manage to get this done?

The last products added to the Sewn Signs shop inventory were the precious accents: metallic threads. Not just a metallic aspect, but actual fine gold leaf, ingeniously spun around a cotton thread core. Then there are the metallic sequins and *tel* that I chose directly from India, from the vast bazaar of Jaipur, in January 2020 right before the pandemic. This is the true home of these materials, it is where they were invented and where they are still produced using the right technique, at the best possible quality. Those that made it to Turkey had been already adapted and modified compared to their initial form.

The change introduced by these new materials occurred too slowly for us to process it properly. But we all knew for sure that we could not go back to inferior quality or substitutes. We started to want to wear these fabrics daily, and not just for celebrations or special occasion shirts, and so production increased. This also made us more interested in understanding cutting

patterns and the ancient solutions used for daily clothes and work clothes.

This subject has not been approached by older studies, as researchers did not believe it to be of great interest. It is also why museums do not have such pieces. It might be that the criteria for how pieces were chosen for preservation was a mainly aesthetic one. This can teach us an important lesson, as it is clear that we cannot afford to only preserve pretty objects for our future. We cannot know what needs the future generations will have, and how they will judge us for what we decided to keep.

From celebration shirts, which are meant to impress with their heavy and full embroidery, we slowly expanded into also considering personal taste, thermic comfort, and movement practicality. We have also worked towards common good, sharing and teaching our discoveries and taking action against fast fashion and Insta-fashion.

We have understood the layered beauty of these shirts, a foundation we have slowly built: at the base sits a high quality durable fabric, then comes the cutting pattern, pragmatic and functional, and then at last, only on the surface, the colorful patterns which are pleasing to the eye. And even the latter play an important role, far beyond adorning our bodies with splashes of color. Only while embroidering them, we can truly meditate on the meanings of these symbols.

Today we can acknowledge and list all the negative outcomes of large-scale cotton crops, which require so much water and so many pesticides. In fact, we know that the so-called organic cotton which is sold to us as a pricier but eco-friendly alternative actually uses even more water, and thus it is not an environmental win at all.

We acknowledge how Europe became "clean," while simply exporting the damaging and polluting coloring industry to Asia, creating dependency on another continent. Europe has yet to solve the issue of responsible fashion, instead of passing it down to be somebody else's problem. Too many species are now endangered or extinct because of greed, a chase for clean image and profits.

As we embroider each little symbol, one by one, on the chest and on the sleeves, we can see that they are not lions, bears, wolves or peacocks, not scary animals, strong and intimidating. Our women chose to embroider the smallest and most modest animals,

which might even go unnoticed by those who do not pay attention to nature. These are the little beings that were so important for those who worked out in the fields and gardens, guiding them with nature's intuitive timing. We are talking of course about insects that keep the soil alive, the trees blooming, the garden bountiful, and the birds well fed. They are the pollinators, for whom the latest studies only predict a catastrophic future: the bees, the butterflies, caterpillars, small flies, ladybugs, and ants. We have dedicated a whole exhibition to them, on June 23, 2022, hosted as usually by the Romanian Peasant Museum.

This is how, step by step, year after year, we have always embroidered for a good cause, and when we accomplished our goal, we moved on to the next, ever more important. We accomplished this because we do not create for selfish reasons or for personal gain, but because we wish to help others with our projects.

We embroider to recover heritage techniques, to master the art of the needle and see it as an extension of ourselves.

We embroider to bring our heritage shirts home and into the present, from historical exhibits of textile museums from all over the world into the *Ia Aidoma* exhibition.

We embroider to complete the big tableau of Romanian shirts, so that the public at large may recognize their complexity and stay away from the mass produced copies, made by machines and sold cheaply. The *Ia Aievea* exhibition remains a flagship phenomenon which generated creations that are still used for inspiration. The Romanian word *aievea* translates roughly to "embodied," as in a dream coming true. The exhibition was on display in Sibiu, in two locations of the ASTRA Museum, from June to December 2018. In March 2019, the *Ia Aievea* shirts could be admired in Tokyo; unfortunately, further plans were put on hold because of the COVID pandemic.

We embroider to bring hemp and *altiță* shirts into our concrete cities, in every large Romanian and European city, to prove that our heritage is alive and will live on beyond a dowry chest.

We embroider to enrich the UNESCO chapter dedicated to the *altiță* shirts.

We embroider to spread the word and

encourage beginners to make their own shirts.

We embroider to prove that our generation is playing its part.

We embroider to dress our daughters for their graduation festivities at famous international universities. We embroidered to impress the crowds of Paris, in front of the famous *La Blouse Roumaine* painting,[19] visiting Brâncuși[20] in his own atelier.

We embroider to raise the alarm, to preserve and teach ancient symbols, the way we inherited them from our grandmothers. We embroider to put Romania on the map of luxury embroidery, on the international map of responsible fashion, on the map of European heritage, as an example in education.

And we will continue to embroider because what we wear is what defines us, influences others and initiates discussions, favoring exchanges of information and creating change.

Photo credits Sewn Signs Association.

NOTES

1. Horațiu Silviu Ilea is a museum specialist on traditional clothing at the Romanian Peasant Museum.

2. Traditional Romanian blouse.

3. The gusset is a patch of cloth used to widen the sleeves of a shirt.

4. Triangular or rectangular piece of fabric, used to enlarge garments.

5. Cuff of cloth, or lace, applied to the sleeves of a blouse.

6. Angled stitch used in embroidery.

7. Decoration sewn on cloth in order to adorn and protect the neck of a blouse.

8. Angled stitch used in embroidery, a local version of the cross-stitch technique.

9. Decoration obtained using the chain stitch technique, with a common center.

10. Technique of embroidery derived from weaving.

11. In Romanian, *ia aidoma* translates as "look-alike shirts"/ replicas of shirts.

12. School of Traditional Romanian Blouse.

13. http://www.tesaturisanatoase.ro/.

14. https://muzeulastra.ro/en/.

15. Traditional blouse with embroidery on the shoulder.

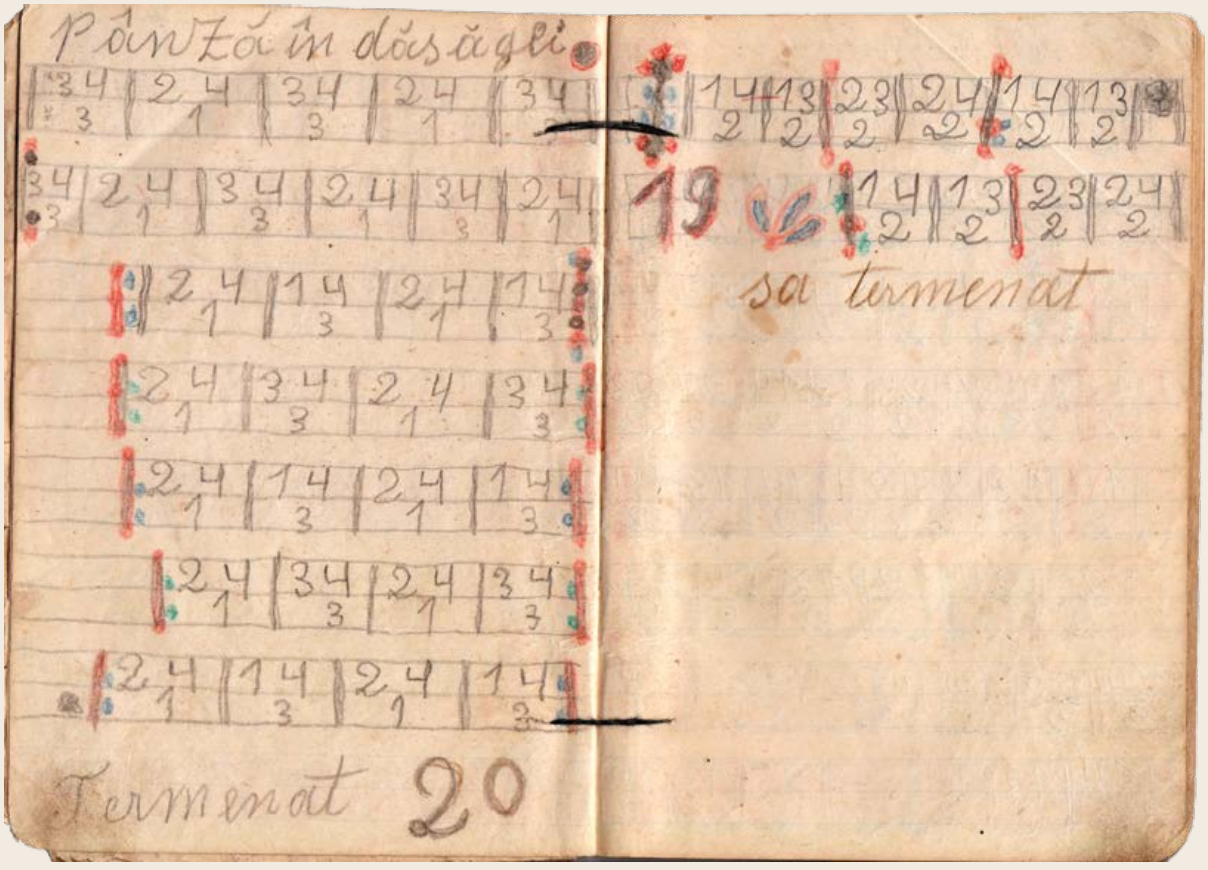
16. Ornament on the sleeve of the women's traditional blouse.

17. Decoration in meandering lines, which adorns the sleeves of a traditional blouse.

18. For details, see: https://atelierzitron.de/startseite/.

19. *La Blouse Roumaine* is Henri Matisse's painting (1940) displayed at Pompidou Centre (Paris)

20. Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957) was a Romanian sculptor who made his career in France. His studio is part of the Pompidou Centre (Paris).



IV. Book Reviews

Ana Pascu, and Valeria Olenici. 2021. *Povești în șezătoare.* Illustrated by Beatrice Iordan. Bucharest: Martor, 160 p.

Reviewed by Maria Mateoniu – Micu
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
mariamateoniu@gmail.com

Mateoniu – Micu, Maria. 2022. "Ana Pascu, and Valeria Olenici. 2021. *Povești în șezătoare*. Illustrated by Beatrice Iordan. Bucharest: Martor, 160 p." *Martor* 27: 193-194.

Modern society, and even more so today's hyper-technological society, as Michel de Certeau remarked as early as the 1980s, shows an unfortunate strong tendency to replace stories and storytellers with "citation" and "recitation" of stories, in the simulacrum performance produced by a power, pretending to offer the truth (1984: 189). The danger here is that the everyday as human invention and creation is evicted, and memory and stories are replaced with ideology and Manichean totalitarian thinking.

Ana Pascu and Valeria Olenici's book *Povești în șezătoare* [Storytelling bee], illustrated by Beatrice Iordan, works as a counterweight for this harmful tendency, an antidote against oblivion, a plea for coming together around perennial values. It is the result of the serendipitous encounter between an ethnologist passionate about fieldwork, Ana Pascu, and a gifted storyteller belonging to the old village world, Valeria Olenici, a simple peasant woman from Horodnicul de Jos, Suceava County. The warm, friendly dialogue between Ana and granny Valeria, as she is lovingly nicknamed in the book, is reminiscent of Maurizio Catani and Suzanne Mazé's seminal oral history study *Tante Suzanne, une histoire de vie sociale* (1982). Storyteller Suzanne Mazé takes on the challenge of answering historian Maurizio Catani's questioning about her personal life at various points in time and in various contexts. Instead of the objectivity so much touted by the social sciences and humanities, we are offered the truth that springs from the weave of recounted history, from the confrontation with one's personal history. Moreover, we witness the friendship born out of the many meetings between the historian and the storyteller. Instead of cold, dry science—in Certeau's terminology, "citation"—we get to participate in a living reenactment summoned up by the memories skillfully brought forth by the specialist who, in his turn, swears off distance in favor of subjectivity and lived truth. This is also the case for Ana Pascu and Valeria Olenovici, as they successfully make the collective imaginary and the living memory of the traditional village relevant today.

Ana Pascu is an ethnologist at the Romanian Peasant Museum, deeply dedicated to her profession. Interested in the study of folklore, villages and children, as well as of current transformations of memory and heritage, Ana Pascu is the initiator of several cultural projects. In 2009 she obtained her PhD in Philology with the thesis *Texte și contexte ale jocurilor cu reguli în mediul urban* (Texts and contexts of games with rules in the city), and she is the author

of several research papers (Pascu 2019; 2020; 2022, among others).

As we learn from the biography with which the book opens, Valeria Olenici was born to peasant parents in Horodnicul de Jos. She grew up with five siblings, Calistrat, Aniţa, Ileana, Ion, and Raveca. "Despite having only attended primary school for four years, she was endowed with an exceptional memory, she knew dozens of poems and songs by heart ..." (p. 7). She married Ilarion, a boy from her village, and they had five children together, Dimitrie, Ileana, Marioara, Dionisie, and Constantin "whom they raised to be hard-working sensible people" (p. 11).

Valeria's stories are admirably enhanced by Beatrice Iordan's illustrations, who is both a consummate artist and a specialist in peasant culture, working as illustrator, musician passionate about peasant-inspired music, and actor in theater plays for children. For several years now, she has also worked as a museum educator with the Romanian Peasant Museum, organizing several interactive workshops for children.

As its contents page reveals, Pascu and Olenici's book includes fantastic tales, animal stories, riddles, legends, shouted verses that accompany dancing, true stories, satirical songs, and children's songs. However, it is more than a folklore compendium, standing out as a comprehensive cultural product, a remarkable combination of folklore passed along generations and memory of everyday family and community life. Beyond the plot of the story, an entire background of the peasant world is reenacted, most prominently the regular bees at which the villagers would gather, from November to March, to work together but also tell made-up or real stories, sing, and dance. At the bees the girls would sow, spin, knit sweaters and socks, crochet lace, and the boys would keep them company, with friendship or marriage on their minds. The adults and older villagers would also take part in the bees, headed by the hosts who would serve snacks and entertain their guests. Beyond the bees, however, as the book suggests, there unfolded family life, with its set roles, with the grandparents acting as mediators between generations. Here and there, excerpts of conversations about life in the traditional village, kin and neighbor relations, household work or reciprocal exchange of labor, punctuate the stories. These "bites" of living memory are there to create the background for the fantastic tales, bringing folklore closer to modernity. The book also stands out as an inspired exercise in "translating" the remnants of popular culture, told in local speak, for today's urban fluid yet multipolar world.

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Dagnosław Demski and Dominika Czarnecka, eds. 2021. *Staged Otherness. Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe: 1850–1939.* Budapest – Vienna – New York: Central European University Press, 449 p.

Reviewed by Stelu Șerban
The Institute for Southeast European Studies Bucharest, Romania
steluserban@yahoo.com

Șerban, Stelu. 2022. "Dagnosław Demski and Dominika Czarnecka, eds. 2021. *Staged Otherness. Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe: 1850–1939.* Budapest – Vienna – New York: Central European University Press, 449 p." *Martor* 27: 195-197.

The volume edited by Demski and Czarnecka, although hefty, provides a coherent perspective of a multifarious reality that for a few decades before and after the year 1900 attracted a consistent audience from cities across Central and Eastern Europe, i.e., the theatrical performances of various exotic ethnic groups mainly from Africa, North and South America, or remote regions of Europe (e.g., groups of Sámi or Tartars). Beyond the book's ethnically-connoted subject, adjacent topics such as entertainment consumption of the new Central and Eastern European urban elites, or the deconstruction of the pejorative imaginary, or the pejorative Other, through which these new elites were perceived by Western Europe, come to develop it and give it consistency (pp. 1–44). The volume is, in fact, the result of an international research project funded by the Polish National Science Centre (p. ix).

The volume has a well-defined theoretical framework presented in its introduction, the three topics mentioned above, ethnicity, entertainment production, including advertising in the press of the time (pp. 4–6, 16–18), and the deconstruction of the Other (pp. 8–13), being contextualized through an accurate bibliography. The theoretical analysis in the book's introduction is complemented and excellently illustrated by a series of events related to the tours of these exotic groups around Central and Eastern European regions. The first performance of this kind, that of the "Nubian Caravans," which took place at the Wrocław Zoo in 1876, is singled out. The following year the same group performed in Vienna, where they sparked a real "Nubian craze" (p. 25). These were followed by performances of very diverse exotic groups such as Zulus, Samoyed, Sioux, Sinhalese, etc. (pp. 26 ff.). However, this was only the beginning of a long-standing phenomenon that underwent important changes. For example, the staging of the Other through these performances acquired new dimensions and was perceived differently after the First World War due to an increase of knowledge of these cultures through the development of networks of ethnographic museums, which also included "exotic" collections (pp. 14–15).

The volume is structured into three sections following the theoretical framework developed in its introduction. The first section focuses on the organizational and recruitment pathways of the actors who performed in these shows in the specific contexts of the different areas in Central and Eastern Europe. There was a whole network of entrepreneurs related to the entertainment industry who recruited these groups based on both the tastes and motivations of the audience, as well as the availability of the members of these groups,

themselves extremely open to performing in these shows. The four chapters of the section illustrate this with concrete cases. The first two chapters have Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913) as their central figure. The chapter authored by Hilke Thode-Arora presents the case of the Hagenbecks' impresario companies. Starting from a documentary fund of over 5,000 letters, memoirs, diaries, and administrative records, Thode-Arora restores the activity of these companies, placing Carl Hagenbeck, the most illustrious and successful representative of the family, in the foreground. Bodhari Warsame's chapter follows the phenomenon of "ethnic shows" over a long period, 1885–1930, this time focusing on Somali troupes. It was the same Carl Hagenbeck who first brought Somalis to Europe to perform in ethnographic shows (p. 79). During his long journeys to Africa where he had contacts, Hagenback was drawn to this population group because of their intelligence and sense of dignity, which he also emphasized in performances, trying to dispel the common Romantic image of the primitive savage, but also because of their "strangeness" and "authenticity"—the former meaning "strange but not too strange" for the tastes of his audience (p. 86). Warsame also brings up various collaborators of Hagenbeck, including Hersi Egeh, a native Somali, who was engaged both in the recruitment actions undertaken by Hagenbeck and the organization of various European tours. The other two chapters of the section bring to the fore, alongside the entrepreneurs of this type of entertainment, the figures of those who performed in these shows. Markéta Křížová gives an account of Cherwish, a member of the Chamacoco (Ishir) tribe of the Zamuco language family that inhabited Northern Paraguay, who was brought by Vojtěch Frič (1882–1942) to participate in the International Congress of Americanists in Vienna and stayed on for two years (1908 and 1909) in Europe, becoming the protagonist of several performances and conferences organized by Frič. In his chapter Evgeny Savitsky writes about the 1882 Samoyed Exhibition in Vienna organized by Alexey Kalintsov, a member of a family of wealthy merchants from Arkhangelsk. Friedrich Müller and Josef Szombathy, the former a professor at the University of Vienna and the latter an archaeologist and anthropologist at the Vienna Museum of Natural History, were intrigued by the Samoyeds' presence in Vienna and, with Kalyntsov's consent, conducted anthropological and linguistic studies of the five members of the group. The most interesting was their leader Wasko/Vasily Kanyukov, who died the following year in Vienna shortly before returning to Russia. In a way similar to Křížova's chapter, the resistance of the performers in these ethnic shows is analyzed, and the complex relationships of mutual influence and ambiguity between them and their audience and the entrepreneurs of the shows, respectively, are highlighted.

The second section of the volume focuses on the process of building the European public's image of the ethnic Other. The three chapters show that while there was no single recipe for how these shows were organized, both entrepreneurs and performers continuously sought to arouse the cultural curiosity of the audience and, in the process, deliver meanings to the members of the audience and even have them participate in the performance. The stake of the first chapter in the section, written by Demski, one of the volume's editors, is rather theoretical, namely: "the problem is connected with analyzing a situation in which elements originating from one culture are presented in the context of a different culture" (p. 169). However, the originality of ethnic shows did not consist only in inserting the elements of a culture into another context, which would bring them closer to museum exhibitions, but in the theatricality of how they achieved this, in their performative dimension. In this sense, ethnic shows are exotic "ethno-dramas" with specific techniques and effects. Czarnecka's chapter also focuses on the notion of staging

exoticism, but it is less theoretical in doing so, as it draws on "excerpts from the Polish-language press issued between 1880 and 1914" (p. 203). The image circulated in the press of that period relative to ethnic performances is strongly contrasting with modern ways of controlling the corporeality that urban audiences cultivated at the time. Ballroom dances, for example, more widespread in the urban areas, or the control of the body through the practice of sports contrasted sharply with the dynamic movements, apparently uncontrolled but full of force, and the expressiveness of the performers in the ethnic shows. The last chapter in the section belongs to Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, and it is based on media reports of ethnic shows, the period covered being the first four decades of the twentieth century, and the geographical area, Upper Silesia, a border region of Germany with a rich ethnic mosaic (p. 239). The author points out that despite the region's relative territorial and political marginalization, as well as ethnic fragmentation, the travelling circuses that almost always included ethnic shows created a subjective egalitarianism that united the population of the province and somehow helped it to emancipate itself culturally and politically.

In the last section of the volume over the course of five chapters, the conduct of ethnic shows is examined in several local Central and Eastern European contexts. Two of the chapters, Andreja Mesarič's and Jezebel Kopania's, are closely related to earlier chapters in the volume, such as Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska's chapter, emphasizing the contrast between the representation of the Other in ethnic performances and the construction of regional and later national collective identities. While Mesarič focuses on Slovenian identity in late nineteenth-century Austro-Hungarian Empire, suggestively titling her chapter "Racialized Performance and the Construction of Slovene Whiteness," Kopania examines the emancipatory function of ethnic performances connected with an interest in rural, traditional culture in dismembered Poland starting with the late nineteenth century. With a stronger theoretical approach, Timea Barabas's chapter proposes an analysis of Edward Said's concept of "nesting Orientalism," based on Buffalo Bill's performances created in the 1910s in the multiethnic regions of Banat and Transylvania of present-day Romania. The analysis of the reception in the press of the time shows that the ethnic groups differed in how they perceived these performances, with the Romanians having a positive perception of the Wild West, significantly different from that of ethnic Hungarians and Germans. The remaining two chapters by Maria Leskinen and István Sántha cover different periods in Russian history—narrower, the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, for Leskinen, and broader, from the end of the eighteenth century to the interwar period, for Sántha—but share a similar rather descriptive approach. Interestingly both identify primarily the sensationalist character of staging the Other, and less the building function for collective identities. The chapter authored by Sántha is illustrative in this respect as it connects the "freak" effects that ethnic performances had in late eighteenth-century Sankt Petersburg and the staging of shamanism associated with the so-called superstition and cultural backwardness of interwar Soviet Russia.

The volume edited by Demski and Czarnecka attracts attention through the variety of case studies brought up, as well as the accuracy of the facts and contexts described. But therein lies its weakness too. The narrative is superfluous as the limitation in many chapters to data from the press of the time gives the impression of redundancy. The scope of the theoretical framework outlined in the book's introduction exceeds the set of data, so that the volume reads more like a book of cultural history and less like a contribution to the theoretical literature in the field.

Speranța Rădulescu. 2021. *Regards sur la musique en Roumanie au XX^e siècle. Musiciens, musiques, institutions.* Translated from the Romanian by Cécile Folschweiller. Paris: L'Harmattan, 184 p.

Reviewed by Mariana Hurjui-Său
National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
marianahurjui95@yahoo.com

Hurjui-Său, Mariana. 2022. "Speranța Rădulescu. 2021. Regards sur la musique en Roumanie au XX^e siècle. Musiciens, musiques, institutions. Translated from the Romanian by Cécile Folschweiller. Paris: L'Harmattan, 184 p." *Martor* 27: 198-199.

This is the French translation of Speranța Rădulescu's book *Peisaje muzicale* în *România secolului XX* published in 2002 by Editura Muzicală, Bucharest. Its content remains to this day a landmark for Romanian ethnomusicology, providing an overview of musical phenomena almost entirely overlooked by most Romanian researchers. Rădulescu did not settle to perch on a high horse and describe one type of music—art music preferably—as musicologists can often do wrapped up in their own elitist views. On the contrary, an impartial light is directed at each type of music that populated the Romanian cultural landscape in the twentieth century, linking it to political circumstances, dominating ideologies, "the social functions that they fulfill and the symbolic meanings assigned to them" (p. 9). While this is not a subject easy to summarize, Rădulescu tackled it with all her erudition, her gift for observation, and the outstanding freedom of speech and thought with which she approached each of her studies.

When the book was first published, some of her colleagues read it quite tensely, presumably upset by the equal space given to types of music other than art music, some of which were deemed lacking artistic value altogether. Or maybe they found the association of music and the social, political and ideological circumstances of different historical periods to be too much. Yet for others, the style she used to describe musical facts went against the accepted style of musicology writing. Looking in retrospect, we see it for what it was, a bold research effort, useful to both musicians open to understanding the environment providing the support for the emergence and the survival of different types of music, and a readership without specialized musical training.

The author creates a thread for the book, tying together oral tradition, in the form of peasant music, at one end, and written tradition, in the form of art or academic music, at the other end. Between the two, there is a whole spectrum of other types of music, which when placed in the contexts that produced them, speak openly of the moral and social condition of those who practiced and loved them, without preconceptions and limitations. Music has always existed, and there were never higher or lower kinds of music as ranked by the value judgments of intellectuals and their willingness or unwillingness to acknowledge their presence and to study them.

The book is structured into two sections, "1900–1944" and "1944–1989," respectively, representing the political events that marked the evolution of Romanian music—i.e., the

creation of the nation-state (1918), the beginning of the communist regime (1944), and its demise (1989).

In the first part titled "Debut de siècle: Traditionalisme, modernité, identités locales et nationales" the two ends of the thread, oral vs written, as well as the types of music situated in between the two, i.e., "meso-music," are discussed. Peasant music, which was undergoing a slow decline in early twentieth century, was challenged by the emergence of tarafs, i.e., bands of predominantly Roma professional musicians who earned a living from offering musical services, which would from then on become solely responsible for providing the music for all Romanian rural celebrations. Academic western-inspired music, promoted by the aristocracy and the intellectuals, experienced a surge with the creation of the apparatus required for its functioning—philharmonic orchestras, lyric theaters, artistic salons, etc. Reflecting the intellectuals' aspirations for the affirmation of a *national spirit*, composers made efforts to build a school of composition that would produce Romanian *national music*, a synthesis of western music and elements of orally transmitted local music, taking their cue from the prominent figure of composer George Enescu. This was also when field research of peasant music, as a possible source of *national* sounds, became an almost constant preoccupation for musicians, also stemming from a strong drive to preserve this cultural heritage. Musicologist Constantin Brăiloiu stood out as an innovator of folkloristics and founder of what would be later known as the discipline of ethnomusicology.

The category of "meso-music" followed a trajectory congruent with the heterogeneous dynamics of mass listeners coming from various social, ethnic and professional backgrounds. It included operetta, choir music, brass band and promenade concerts, romances, cabaret music and western popular music, music hall, *muzică ușoară* (Romanian pop music), film soundtrack music, and state music. "Meso-music" provided audio material accessible to all social classes, thus fulfilling the spiritual aspirations and the need for solidarization of the newly-created Romanian nation.

The second part of the book, "1944–1989," sheds light on the dramatic transformations brought about in all areas of society by the communists' coming to power. Drawing on a thorough research, Rădulescu argues that "music always and everywhere stands in the combat range of ideologies" (p. 67). The establishment of the dictatorship and the ideological pressure put on music by an entire state apparatus quickly produced visible changes. The case of Romanian peasant music in the oral tradition stands out, as it was instrumentalized for mass indoctrination purposes. Authentic peasant music was replaced by so-called "folklorized music," a twisted derivative of the former, which the kulturniks claimed to be superior, promoting it through all available channels: public loudspeaker, competitions and festivals, school shows, and television. "Folklorized music" gradually entered the peasant consciousness to be later embraced as a model relentlessly validated by kulturniks.

The world of music is not impervious to manipulation, censorship, and fear. On the contrary, freedom of expression is no more than a fantasy, a smoldering fire in the hearts of intellectuals and ordinary people alike. Without exception, the echo of society's everyday anxieties finds its way into the entire range of musical products of an age. With her ethnologic perspective and analytic skill, Rădulescu offers a well-rounded accurate image of a bleak period in Romania's recent history. The work as a whole depicts a veritable cultural mosaic, which is accessible to us today thanks to researchers of Speranța Rădulescu's caliber, a prominent voice of European ethnomusicology.

The discussion about orality and writing, today, inevitably takes two distinct turns. One related to the orality of peasant cultures, and one that emerges from the recent cultural practices of modernity, practices that combine media and the widespread use of information technology, which leads, inescapably, to the transfer of certain important areas of social life into the virtual realm. Thus, both forms of hypothesizing about the junctures between oral cultures and their written expression determine certain unavoidable methodological perspectives in re-evaluating the (dynamic and ever changing) relationship between orality and writing, in the (re)production of culture we continue to call "traditional," and in the configuration of various local or group cultures that are mediated virtually.

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