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RELIGION AND FOLKLORE OR ABOUT THE SYNCRETISM OF
FAITH AND BELIEFS

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Abstract: The rituals practiced by the initiated and learned by the “chosen ones” so that they can be perpetuated, have generated the existence of two worlds. The first is that of immediate impact, on the first level of perception, amendable in its circumstantial data. The second world is the treasurer of recognizable factors in many similar situations, in stages different from manifestation (circumscribing generations) and elements of the unique, the unusual. The second level has established itself as a human need to periodically immerse in the sacred time. The initiation into the mysteries held by the world of the sacred is made by those who know how to practice it. They are the performers of narrative sequences, which are intended to reinstate the practices, rituals, customs, traditions and beliefs in today’s world. To support our claim, we are going to refer to four surveys, conducted on different, but conjunct topics which have confirmed the hypothesis formulated by us in the early 1990s: folk beliefs, ignored during the communist period and banned within the audiovisual, have merged with religious beliefs and have survived as a second level of perceiving the ritual sequence.

The study highlights the syncretism of the two fields, religious faith and folk beliefs, and the role of mass media in promoting them in order to revitalize the collective memory (what was known) and to contribute to the literacy of the younger generation. The principles of the Orthodox Christian catechesis explain the presence of the priest in the existential ceremonies.

Key Words: rites of passage, the “threshold” moment, the principles of the Orthodox Christian catechesis, cultural consumption, public radio and promoting traditions and religious beliefs.

Introduction

The traditional mentality has imposed the parameters of expressive forms (space, time, color, movement), which help regularly redefine the world of the sacred and the profane. Primary initiation societies, as well as the contemporary micro groups have kept the esoteric nature in their desire to reconstruct the world of the beginnings, the one governed by harmony and rare differences.

The rituals practiced by the initiated and learned by the chosen ones so that they can be perpetuated, have generated the existence of two worlds. The first is that of immediate impact, on the first level of perception, amendable in its circumstantial data. The second world is the treasurer of recognizable factors in many similar situations, in stages different from manifestation (circumscribing generations) and elements of the unique, the unusual. This second world has landmarks on the first level of decoding, regarding history, novelty, those which are easy to understand by most of the community, and a second level of decoding, accessible only to the initiated. The second level has established itself as a human need to periodically immerse in the sacred time.

The world of expressive forms, marked by an aesthetic sensibility enhanced by the nostalgia of beginnings, of the threshold that marks time and space, seems easy to decrypt. It just seems that way. Trying to define it is to redefine it. The newly created image will have another power of suggestion and persuasion, because it depends on the circumstances of the reception, the degree of initiation, the cultural heritage. It keeps the ideational “pillars”, around which new meanings of practices, rituals and customs accumulate.

Trying to understand this world, which reconstructs the beginnings, is a tempting approach, which will need to find a balance between the explanations made in a language accessible to a greater number of readers or auditors and the use of an ethnological discourse, as a reflection of this world. The latter is the instrument of specialists, required for specialized research, while the target audience is comprised of the “initiated” in the areas of folklore, ethnology, ethnography and anthropology.¹

Addressing the world of “beginnings” in an accessible language allows it to be understood by categories different in age, hobbies, training, but may be castigated by specialists as taking an easy approach to the topic. Beyond the form of interpretation there is the intention to identify in today’s world the forms of traditional thinking, their degree of viability, their area of distribution, as well as the unique aspects of a particular area or town.

The answer to our dilemma was given to us by history of this practice itself: while those who allowed themselves to be decrypted survived, the ones that had a hermetic message disappeared. The

exceptions were saved by the formula: "I do not know why, thus I've inherited it, thus it's been done."

The initiation into the mysteries held by the world of the sacred is made by those who know how to practice it. They are the ones who know how to decode the message by describing props, reproducing the significant sequences, interpreting the circumstantial data of ritual practice. They are the performers of narrative sequences, which are intended to reinstate the practices, rituals, customs, traditions and beliefs in today's world. They are the most listened to and read, because "stories sell." To support our claim, we are going to refer to four surveys, conducted on different, but conjunct topics: "The Cultural Consumption Barometer, 2009"; the study on cultural consumption in the city of Craiova, conducted from 1 to 15 July 2010 by the Oltenia Social Institute of the University of Craiova; the "Evaluation of the competence level in the media" report, Bucharest, June 2008, which followed an extensive survey developed within the project entitled "Do we have expertise in the media?" – implemented within the Media Education project launched by the ActiveWatch Press Monitoring Agency and funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI), London, UK; and the radio audience levels in Oltenia in 2012. Such surveys have confirmed the hypothesis formulated by us in the early 1990s: folk beliefs, ignored during the communist period and banned within the audiovisual, have merged with religious beliefs and have survived as a second level of perceiving the ritual sequence. The methods: the use of common objects, symbolically invested, and similar community practices.

Reasons for the choice of topic

The 20 year field research to develop the Radio ethnography and folklore magazine, "Izvorasul", broadcast on Radio Romania Oltenia Craiova, regional public broadcaster of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Society, has offered us the chance to observe the context of unique ethnography and folklore aspects, which were construed within the frame of the conservative rural community, of religious beliefs and folk traditions. The functionality of the two reporting levels (folk and religious) has proved the interdependence of the two worlds, and their connection to the elements that have ensured their sustainability over time. Unique issues were discussed on Radio Romania News, Radio Romania Cultural, Radio Romania International, which contributed to the circulation of ideas and attracted the attention of audiences different in expectations, professions, hobbies, belonging to geographical locations close to or far from the research area.

The aim of the study is to highlight the syncretism of the two fields, religious faith and folk beliefs, and the role of popular media in promoting them in order to revitalize the collective memory (what was known) and

to bring it to the attention of the younger generation who did not live the rites of passage (the most expressive in the theme substantiation) and does not have a religious education based on the practice of religious rites. To achieve this goal it has been necessary to assess the number of programs dedicated to the promotion of folk culture and religious-themed broadcasts within audiovisual programs, which was done by the National Broadcasting Council and the Oltenia Social Institute of the University of Craiova. The two reports generated a double image, one at a national level, the second at a regional level.

The purpose of the initial approach was to certify the functionality of popular beliefs and religious faith within micro groups or remote rural communities, conservative primary forms, unaltered by the influences of city life.

The objectives of the study materialized in the result analysis of the investigations carried out by the relevant institutions with the purpose of offering a relatively structured image of the impact the audio-visual has on education and literacy. The following parameters were analyzed: the role, influence and effects of mass media and the expectations. With an experience of over two decades in Romanian public broadcasting I can explain and contextualise the results of these surveys in terms of internal dynamics in the media, which have the function of literacy.

After 1990, traditions and beliefs could be commented upon in a censorship free manner: one could speak of carols, strigoi (evil spirits, similar to vampires), exorcisms, and beliefs about other worlds.

Considered taboo topics for a long time, they would be claimed as favorite topics after 1990. A rediscovery of the issues was called for, as they had been willingly ignored or presented in a symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical key, meant to escape censorship.

At the same time, they had been transferred from the sphere of the occult to the one of the spectacular. After being certified, they needed rescuing from oblivion, their original shape had to be recorded as second degree information (information from information).

The ethnography and folklore aspects have borne and still bear significant pressure, as they are to be preserved, because "it's good that it be known", and to be helpful to the community. Their sapient nature, the warding functions still catalyze the community's interest today.

Taking all this into consideration, the sequences of rituals, traditions and beliefs that we have witnessed in the last two decades are still functional in the space of Oltenia. Collective memory has retained their originality, whereas informant-trainers (teachers, cultural entertainers, priests) have kept them because of the similarity with other customs and beliefs observed at the beginning of the century by field researchers. Their continuity can be thus observed, even if there are various versions (which is specific to folk beliefs).

The research instruments

We have used are the field research (the survey) and the method of comparative analysis of the program scales transmitted by the broadcasting licensees in wave 3-2012. At the same time we matched the conclusions to the program schedule of the regional station of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Society (Radio Romania Oltenia Craiova) from a dual perspective, the implementation of cultural programs and their coordination (personal experience). The programs we have analyzed have been classified as following: programs primarily designed to stimulate artistic and / or intellectual curiosity, cultural performances, cultural activities, programs meant to broaden public knowledge on various cultural fields and religious programmes in the religious-educational and religious act categories.

The synthetic results of the study lead to the idea that not much attention is paid to cultural issues in radio / TV programs. In rural communities there is a syncretism of religious faith and popular beliefs, the most eloquent proof being the rites of passage.

Between the temptation of reconstructing archetypal patterns and that of desacralization

The ethnographic truth is not a whole, for it inbounds notes of the popular ethos and the personal interpretation of the one that mirrors the world, all inscribed in the coordinates of time and space. The popularity-credibility ratio is marked by a tendency towards pragmatism which has a power of persuasion over time. The practices generated by a system of thought in which the transcendent and the quotidian merged together had a high degree of credibility and were considered accessible to This World. The initiates in the secrets of ritual practices were to be part of both worlds: they were tied to the "immediate" by their mortal condition, and to the transcendent, by their knowledge which was not to be analysed, explained. To the same effect, this knowledge would be "stolen" (e.g. an incantation is "stolen", it is not taught by the midwife who places the ritual objects on the table of the Fates without revealing their significance so that it can preserve their warding value). Customs have been conserved, sometimes in functional variants which differed in their content, in their complex form, due to their immediate practice of everyday life. They have generated variants according to location, actors and local traditions (e.g. boborodita and ponuda - the moments the newborn's status is established within the family; the participants are only women).

Sending information without systematizing the material has imposed trends of recomposing the mythological system of representation in a

second functionality plane. Superstitious stories, such as mythological beliefs became first degree information, the most long-lasting type.

On the other hand the attitudes of desecration, of distrust in beliefs and superstitions have led to their transformation into epic structure imbued with notes of popular humour, sometimes essentialized into memorable folk phrases or sayings whose decoding involves levels of meaning.

As mentioned Mircea Eliade, “for homo religious, real, authentic existence starts when he receives the communication of this primordial history and assumes its consequences”, but “this dramatic and sometimes tragic primordial history must not only be known but also continuously recalled”². In the traditional community, the understanding of the meaning of life and of the ritual acts that had to be integrated in the existential ceremonies was based upon the explanations given by the elderly and on their reiteration at moments of passage. In the conservative areas that had a traditional mentality, this used to be and still is a way of reiterating norms of behaviour in order to pass from one to another stage of life by assuming the history of the ritual acts. This is how the ritual gesture on which the folk and religious beliefs are based was and is understood.

Regardless of the manner in which the ethnographic material has been deemed to highlight the spiritual traditional manifestations, as credible or not, their syncretic nature places them at the boundary between the everyday and the transcendent, being particularly needed in overcoming limit situations.

The village was and has remained a territory of originality, the bridge between the ephemeral and the eternal. Each daily occurrence has power of suggestion and is marked by potentiality. Therefore “interpreters” were needed, those who know how to decipher the code on levels of meaning and to foreground them, depending on the circumstances and qualities of the interlocutors, who desire to be initiates or just to overcome limit situations.

These two aspects have imposed various reactions from passive reception to acceptance, with one purpose only: to get in harmony with this world and stay in touch with the world of beyond, otherwise indestructible.

It thus seeks to meet two key codes: an official code imposed by society, which can be noticed in the ceremonies on the first level of decoding, and is accessible to all, made explicit in order to be followed, a condition of integration into society, and a code of the initial models, which is willingly borne, more or less acknowledged by the members of society (sometimes acquiesced and not publicly acknowledged, especially due to its original, sometimes odd practices and rites). The latter must be discovered. It stands as a personal endeavour, a journey of initiation through which one may attain the recognition of the community or may

attract its scorn. It's a risk one takes in the name of faith or the temptation of pushing one's limits.

Reality confirms the permanent tendency of stripping the cosmic values off the archetypal code, of loss of meaning in gestures and ritual practices, of preserving their spectacular nature within a show needed by the community times of transition from one state to another, from one status to another (e.g., the newborn goes from the status of outsider to the status of member of the family through the ritual practiced by midwives at birth and then at the table of Fates and through the consecration rite of denomination which merges with the act of baptism, of Christianization).

The physical evidence of the existence of the two plans, this world which exists in a profane time and place and the other side which belongs to a sacred time and space, consists in ritual objects of dual value: the profane one (of immediate, daily use) and the sacred (of official use in practices, rituals and traditions).³

The world of the sacred is in fact a mental projection of the images of our immediate world.⁴ The immediate world shows glimpses of the projections of the sacred world. Therefore the world should be deemed as having a double meaning. Today's gesture and word may have value in another world, but the rules imposed by a frame of initiation must be respected, as the many prohibitions are established in order to protect the human world from supernatural intrusion. Only the "chosen ones" can do it. And here lies the dilemma: what "marks" must the "chosen ones" bear, what skills must they possess to be considered as such and be entrusted with restoring order and harmony?

The "chosen ones" know how it was. However, to see also means to alter according to one's perception. To what degree do they comply with these initial models, to which they have access by acquiring information? How much will they alter it and in what way? By wishing to reconstruct the primary world exaggerations may be produced, which distances the re-created from the primary form. In a good or a bad manner? Does the table of the Fates have all ritual objects? And what are they all? Will omissions or additions have an augmentation or diminution effect on the context and implicit meanings of these ritual objects? Where does the role of the traditional performer end and where does it interfere with the role of the priest?

Between those who copy the original model and those who diminish its value there is a competition which cannot be seen, but can sometimes be felt. As a result over time, one can notice a preservation of a core of traditions, customs, beliefs circumscribed to the existential ceremonies. It is necessary to reveal it through primary information or through information from information, if only to prove the durability of these archetypal scenes and mythological characters.

The approach resembles the arduous and risky act of restoring church paintings: covered by candle smoke (objects necessary to the ritual act), they reveal their initial beauty and significance when the layers of time are removed. In this process of good intentions, the painting may be damaged and even destroyed, if those who are trying to restore it have no special training.

It is the same with the reconstruction of archetypal patterns – a leap back in time actually occurs, underneath the layers of ages, in search of primary forms unaltered by time. It is a look into the depth beyond the passage of time.

Field research information and audio recordings that we made during 1990-2013 (level II information) are evidence of habit and custom practices in functional variants at the beginning of the twentieth century. We have written them down so that they are not forgotten and be used as material needed for future interpretations.

Bearing in mind that the aesthetic aspects of habits, beliefs and old “words” were noted by Romanian radio listeners, we have wished for potential readers to have the image of these ethnographic and folkloric facts as inner journeys, emotional forays into the world of today’s village. We have selected the most representative sequences of passage rites, the symbolism of ritual objects used in traditional and religious practices and interviews with performers and bearers of folklore and we have included them in the volume “*Ice flowers*”⁵. As the topics cover the inner mythology area, and refer to the daily practices, the synthetic form will partially address the usefulness of the information (in the sense of remembering the stages of ritual sequences and ritual props) and the psychological foundation of spiritual repertory.

The pretext of inner journeys serves the *restitutio* and re-creation images of the novel aspects in ethnography and folklore. It is a process determined at the same time by a comparative approach of a world of tradition on the verge of extinction and a world of globalisation. It is also an anthropological endeavour, since “the anthropologist deals with some kind of cultural geography (...) Culture and society become mere fragments between a globalist and a localistic rhetoric, forgetting that they are efficient when places in simultaneity (the short time of globalisation) and historicity (the long time of tradition and memory)”⁶. While the rural environment is more conservative, the urban environment has an obvious dynamics that replaces tradition with modernity, by in fact altering traditional values.

What is the movement of these beliefs in urban areas (outside practice space) and which are the preferred cultural products?

A study on cultural consumption in the city of Craiova, targeted mass cultural consumption and its media impact on the public; it was conducted from 1 to 15 July 2010, the by the Oltenia Social Institute of the University of Craiova, on a sample audience reproducing the structure of 16 areas of

Craiova. We selected people over 18 years of age, in the amount of 400 subjects. It is a local research, but significant on a national level, as the city of Craiova has a poignant cultural life (conducted even in times of financial crisis), where regional public radio and television stations and local private stations operate. The former possess essential functions of education and literacy.

Some of the survey data are indicative of the hypothesis that the attention of the media is not centered on promoting cultural values explanatory programs, accessible to a wide and heterogeneous public of average training, and at the same time the public of cultural events can be found in small percentage, the audio-visual, and especially television, being most often the only source of information and training.

With regard to cultural activities and cultural consumption, 44.4% of respondents go to music and entertainment shows a few times a year or less, 37.1% visit museums and art exhibitions several times a year or less. An alarming percentage refers to the theatre or opera and operetta, only 34, 4% and 18.5% prefer this kind of cultural activities. 40.5% and 69, 5% of subjects never go to the theatre, opera and operetta. Popular music is listened to by 23, 5% of Craiova, whereas classical music or opera is only enjoyed by 4.7%.

Study results justify our endeavour to simultaneously transmit field research supporting the idea of recovering popular and religious beliefs and restoring them to the community's cultural agenda through both regional public radio and the printed volume.

„The enabling or, on the contrary, the expulsion of religion from the public sphere has its basis in the non-recognition of the primary nature of a violence *medium* from which both religion and politics nourish. [...] But if the religious and the political themselves nourish from a common root – in this case, from violence – then each acts, in its irreducibility, as an access way to this common root”.⁷ If cultural information is contextualised and illustrated by means of examples of field research, it will acquire a higher degree of credibility and will thus become more persuasive and easier to absorb. This way, religion and politics (to continue the referential axis) will contribute to the elimination of violence-generating factors.

An example: the “threshold” moment and the principles of the Orthodox Christian catechesis

The principles of the Orthodox Christian catechesis (the act of teaching the people about Jesus Christ and His Church) can explain the presence of the priest in the existential ceremonies. To illustrate this we have chosen a symbolic place – the threshold and a threshold-moment in an area with multiple meanings: the house.

The peasant house and yard have always been the expression of harmony, based on the synthesis of the aesthetic and the useful,

circumscribing the image of communion with the world around us and the world Above. The house represents “places of life” which “gathered together as in one place” may represent the real purpose of the hearth. The word house will be the metonymic expression of an integrating structure of “living spaces”⁸.

Acasă (home) means really taking this space, defining the affiliation to an aesthetically and functionally customised place. You can only be acasă in your house and in your backyard. Home is the graphic expression of union with space. Romanians only use one word for the denomination of this place adverb – the French say *à la maison*, the Italians say *a casa* – two or more words, of which only one has a syntactic value. “The various functions and significations acquired by the environment, the usually inhabited area, but also by other information used in these moments speak for themselves”.⁹ Folk belief consecrates a space for each existential moment of passage. The mother’s womb is the space of the pre-existence, the fulfilled existence (marriage) unfolds in the house of the young couple, while the post-existence will have two spaces: the grave, for the body, and the heavenly house (as called in Oltenia), for the soul. The entering of a each house of the existential moment of passage is marked by ritual acts of passage that hold functions and meanings specific to the existential moment in cause.

The Romanian feeling of belonging to a place of commitment and possession, offers life majesty and responsibility alike.

“Home” has the power of suggestion, which does not diminish the unique and unexpected image of named space, but even augments the symbol fund that needs to be decoded with a folk key.

Entering a defined space is done by passing the threshold, a sign of distinction between worlds, between states. Just as the human soul has many veils, gradually raised to reveal feelings, the peasant house has several thresholds within the real, the concrete and also the spiritual life, seen in a diachronic progress by respecting the ceremonies of the most important moments of existence.

It is living in concentric circles, from inward to outward, from within the house to the main lane. The threshold is the point of balance between the worlds. The peasant crosses the threshold to be in harmony with himself and his people. He comes home, not to the house! Harmony only occurs in a defined space. Even when building the house, one knows that exiting the harmony towards the outside world, exiting one own’s world and entering the world of all means facing obstacles that must be overcome. The windows have bars, the door has a latch. You have to want to come out of your own space, make the gesture that motivates the attitude of temporary or eternal departure. Therefore, the threshold is a sign of wisdom. You know what you are doing and especially for how long.

The doorstep and the door of the house are two boundaries and two apertures to the universe. And there are also the thresholds of the year,

signs of the weather earmarked by “moși” (the old ones). The threshold divides space and time, restoring their ability to regenerate, to rebuild its initial unity, it is actually the nostalgia of perfect beginnings, the forces of the sky (time) and the earth (space) were fully unleashed. It is the desire to periodically return to this perfection. Eternity is the encircling limit of any time.¹⁰

The doorstep as an element of the concrete is the place where the most important existential moments take place, in which the actants of the popular rite and the priest participate. It is also the place which symbolically unites faith and religion. “Religion equally refers to beliefs and to rites, the latter originating in shared beliefs that legitimate them”.¹¹ Ritual and religious practices converge. What is important is to find their common roots.

Birth, baptism (rites of passage and denomination) and the Christocentric principle

The central figure of all Catechesis is Jesus Christ the Saviour. The Christocentric principle is the first principle adopted by the one who performs the ritual act (the popular performer and the priest), and equally by the journalist who transmits through each public intervention the love of God and neighbour, a spiritual state that protects from excesses and compromises. The newborn's image is one that catalyzes the feelings of love in the community. Referring to the threshold, we note its valence within rite of passage and within the religious one.

The baby is given to the midwife over the threshold so that she can deliver him to the room especially prepared for the newborn. It is a magical transfer to a purified space where the table, a warding element, was set for the Fates. From the mother to midwife and then to the godmother – this is the way of initiation from coming into the world and the integration in the community, as a Christian, to that which will trace the path in life.

The threshold of the church is passed by the midwife with the baby in her arms and the baptism (after the Christian denomination) the godmother is the one illustrating the state of christened child.

The newborn needs love (warmth) and light. St. John the Theologian tells us that love is God: “He who does not love has not known God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). And St. John also tells us that “God is light” (1 John, 1:5). Love is the light. St. Isaac the Syrian says: “The love of God is warmth above nature ... the heart of he who feels it cannot bear it, but for the measure of the quality of love coming to him, unwonted change arises within him. And its signs are these: the man's face is fire red and full of charm and his body warms up”.¹² All this, in the name of the Christocentric principle.¹³

“The democratic human being of contemporary societies acts in public space in a manner in many ways similar to human conduct in traditional societies in the median space of religious experience”.¹⁴ In a public space (by means of the mediatic discourse or of an institutionalised environment), the presentation of the folk or religious ritual practices which establish the *norma* of community behaviour, observed from generation to generation, has two functions:

- to recall such practices, so that they match what the community already knows, but may soon forget;
- to correlate folk and religious belief, in order to create a common basis for behaviour within the community.

In both cases, though, the poetry of both magical objects and gestures is recalled, both belonging to a magical poetry of predestination.¹⁵

The Wedding - rite of separation and definitive aggregation and the ecclesiocentric principle

The catechism practiced by St. Cyril of Jerusalem took place within the Church and aimed to bind the catechumen to the Church “the real ship that leads to salvation of the soul.” Conducting existential ceremonies in the church, the sacred space, leads to their substantiation upon the ecclesiocentric principle. The wedding ceremony is the most expressive of all, as it is “binding” by the sacrament of matrimony. The rite of separation and of passage from the status of unwedded to that of wedded is centred on the threshold.

The bride and groom bid forgiveness from their parent on the threshold. The parents stand beyond the threshold, in the house, while the couple stands on the other side in the world that will bring a new order in their life. This moment is affectively marked by awareness that the young couple leave life as they know it, their family micro-universe behind and set for a new world, where they have to build the “home”. There is a transition to in another state, which will have a different status and other moral norms. You should not go astray on the road, nor leave with your soul laden with remorse. That is the role of forgiveness. The groom will cross the threshold of the bridal chamber, the bride in his arms. He “links” her to the house. Going out of this area without the man knowing is a breach of the moral code held by the community.

Also on the threshold is poured a pot of water, a sign that the bride transits to a new status, that of woman. Water is a symbol of the road in life, the road’s initial point being the threshold. After the wedding night, it is on the threshold that they break the pot the water has been poured from as a sign that the young bride is now part of the women community (a practice in Dolj County).

The “Binding” in the love of Christ is done church, and only after this religious act come the wedding moments, the young couple may held

hands only after coming out of the church and only now at that moment is the marriage perfected.

The Great Journey and the first catechesis

“The first catechesis presented the main articles of faith to the catechumens, subsequently crystallized in the Nicene symbol, that is: the monotheism, the incarnation, the death, the resurrection and the ascension into heaven of Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, the Resurrection, eternal life and the Second Coming of Christ”.¹⁶

There is circularity, a hope beyond life, the passage (escorted passage) over the threshold within a rite of separation, aggregation, in funeral ceremonies. “When we speak of death, we enter a sphere of illusions”.¹⁷ Louis -Vincent Thomas defines the sphere as a couple: the illusion of transparency and the illusion of communication with the person who dies.¹⁸

It is over the threshold that the coffin, the body of wood is passed, without the soul which has already departed on the great journey. It is the threshold of a road of no return. The dead is taken out of the house through the door, feet first, so that he/she has no reason to return. Afterwards a clay pot of incense is broken on the threshold, to remove all the trouble from the house. A moment of great tension is when the coffin is stopped right on the threshold, the sequence embodying the struggle between the forces that govern this world and the world of beyond. The World of Darkness will prevail, because the body has no soul and it cannot stay in the White World. The threshold should be tidy and even cleaned in those circumstances when it is believed that the souls of the dead come back.

The threshold is not only a sign of demarcation between worlds. It is the focal point of the forces invoked by the ritual gesture that can restore order, normality. The child will be protected from the evil eye if he/she will be made to reach the beam or the threshold of the house with his/her forehead. It is on the threshold that children who cry too much are breastfed. This is a resettlement of the spectrum of normality in a place where forces converge.

The threshold is regarded as a concrete landmark in terms of age as well. It has the meaning of the age threshold, it is the place where the actual and desired state of things are certified, a sequence of states in the journey of the rites of passage, marks in the development of the existential.

When in the course of these existential sequences the unnatural is installed, the “threshold” is cursed. When a young man dies - in an

illogical interruption of life - the funeral ceremony has specific elements of the wedding ritual. The threshold is not a place for forgiveness, but for the funeral incantations. When the bride and groom are aged or old, they do not ask for forgiveness from their parents, because in this case, the parents are usually memories. The unnatural makes the passing over the Threshold into a new state seem eerie.

The sign of the cross is made on the threshold, a warding gesture invested with affective-emotional force:

- when leaving for the road, to remove potential obstacles;
- when leaving the house at night, in order not to meet strigoaice (female evil spirits);
- in the rite of passage from one state to another: the sign of the cross is made on the child before being given to the midwife, the bride and bridegroom make the sign of the cross after asking for forgiveness from the parents, the family members of the deceased make the sign of the cross after the pot of incense is broken on the threshold.

The crossroads has an intermediate threshold value, passage must be paid. Money found in crossroads is used as warding charms.

The role of the priest in the burial ritual is essential. Songs are sung at crossroads, money is thrown, they reconstitute the way through the community and make stops in places where the deceased had relatives or lived. The priest consecrates the place, also marks and purifies it after the deceased passes by.

As life offers thresholds to be crossed, thresholds between states, overcome through rites of passage, so does time. The year thresholds are marked by Moși, holidays dedicated to the memory of those who died: winter Moși (on the Saturdays before the start of the main fasting), spring Moși (on the day of the 40 Martyrs), summer Moși (on the Saturday before the Sunday of the Descent of the Holy Spirit), fall Moși (before the day of the Holy Virgin Mary or before the Day of the Cross). The year is "cut" into two by the Eve, the seasons by the Moși. It is always on a Saturday, day of the dead and religious faith marks this as the day of their celebration. Ritual foods are those sanctioned by the church as food offerings.

The esoteric significance of threshold is claimed by the status of a transition space between the sacred and the profane. The access over the threshold must be allowed. Sentences such as "You do not cross my threshold" represent a prohibition of entering the universe of the family and it is a decision drawn from the belief that the individual does not meet the moral norms of the family code, the rules of the house. The threshold is a "border" one commits to in accordance with the mentality that governs the life of sacred micro-space. It will be the catalyst and guide in the magical, mythical, spiritual activity, a point of convergence of the forces that govern the world of concentric circles. This "boundary" separates "the cultural space" (*intra muros*) of the evil manifestations that may happen in the natural space (*extra muros*).¹⁹

According to folk mentality, protecting sacred space required a structure of concentric circles. The first circle was limited by the threshold, within the intimate, family space (the small family circle). The second circle was the yard, the backyard, the exit being the gate (the great family circle). The third circle did not have borders. Everything beyond the peasant's yard represented the Enlightened World, bordered by the horizon, the sky and its heights (the circle of the world).

The feeling of self-protection made the farmer hold all the tools necessary to the household in the yard. The exchange of products was held beyond the family space, because "it is difficult to give things from your yard" (in the sense of difficulty to emotionally detach oneself from what they earn over the year). When old people sell things from the house it is a sign of the dissolution of the family micro-universe, a loss of balance and harmony.

The house, regarded as the center of the world, becomes a temporal landmark (a succession of generations) in a vertical perspective and a geographical landmark (designation of a community) in a horizontal approach.

Crossing beyond the desired sacred area is a symbolic journey to the limit, to the gate. It is a necessary step in existential moments of becoming in order to reach the maximum intensity of emotional experiences. The threshold of the house is a first passage way, the gate is the second. What happens beyond the spatial demarcation can be evil, characterized by disorder. Therefore one must "clean up" the area in front of the gate and the door, the foulness (dirty things) is thrown away from the house, and if it is invested with the marks of evil it is left at a crossroads.

The gate, a sign of the great family circle, is a witness to all events in the family life: birth, marriage, death. The house itself has a double meaning as a place of the family and community life and it is not complete without a yard and a gate. A symbol of cohesion, the gate holds a concrete symbolic place in the rites of passage to a new socio-cultural status (it is the historical concrete of the community), but it is also a witness to warding rituals of reinstallation of peace and order by invoking the protective spirit. All are crowned by the "feeling of eternity".²⁰

Romanian folk mentality has perpetuated these symbols in order to motivate the need of belonging to a certain space, bordered by the signs of transcendence and necessary to a journey of initiation towards our circle of boundlessness.

Space and time are perceived in concentric circles; crossing from one circle to a new one brings a new threshold-experience. In time, this concentric image has been abandoned and a linear vision imposed itself. Dohotariu mentions Danièle Hervieu-Léger's idea about the diminished rituality in modern societies by highlighting the way that the perception of time has changed. More precisely, the cyclic representation of temporality has been gradually replaced by a linear representation.²¹

We should have in mind two directions of analysis simply called the Peasants and the Peasant: “*peasants* are part of reality; *the peasant* is a metonymy of reality”.²² All the major events in our peasants’ lives are under the sign of light.²³ For this reason, the passages are assumed in an event that unifies the community.

The media impact of religious faith and popular beliefs

Our field research has certified the functionality of ritual sequences involving folk performers and the priest. In urban areas these sequences are perceived as unique ethnography and folklore aspects. The mature and older generation still remembers them. The young only discover it through level II information (information from information). We have analyzed the impact of these popular and religious beliefs on young audiences, using a sociological research conducted by institutions.

First, we refer to the “Cultural Consumption Barometer, 2009,” which is an annual research conducted by the Centre for Research and Consultancy on Culture funded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The analysis centered on the development of the cultural sector in Romania, focusing on the three dimensions of study: cultural infrastructure, cultural consumption and the crisis effects on the cultural sector. The survey, which was nationally representative, used a sample of 1100 respondents, over 15 years old, with a boost of 500 questionnaires in Bucharest. The maximum sampling error at a 95% confidence interval was of + / -3% for national data and + / -5% for Bucharest ([http://www.culturadata.ro/Cercetari% 20finalizate. html](http://www.culturadata.ro/Cercetari%20finalizate.html) Cultural Consumption Barometer 2009).

It was a warning about the decrease of the public interest in cultural and religious values, a necessary endeavour to illustrate public expectations at this point in the history of the community.

The next perspective is that of the local impact. Returning to the study conducted by the Oltenia Social Institute of the University of Craiova, which defines cultural consumption in Craiova, we note an important issue. The questions in this survey were targeted on the cultural consumption in Craiova, but it has raised other issues. 12, 5% value the traditional customs and 11.7% - fun and entertainment provided by the municipality. It is surprising that only 9.7% think of the city's history and only 5.4% enjoy cultural activities organized in Craiova. 3.9% do not appreciate anything that the city offers.

The item of preference for reading shows that 16.0% of the respondents never read books, 18.6% only read books a few times a year, 19.0% once a month, and 17.4% read books almost daily. On the other hand, magazines and newspapers are browsed by people in Craiova daily (57, 8%). When they were asked how many books there are in their household, 26.6% of them replied that they have between 101-300 books,

and 57.8% of those between 1-15 years old invest in cultural activities such as movies, magazines, newspapers, performances and books. Only 0, 8% of 16-25 year olds and 26-50 year olds invest in cultural activities.

27.0% of the respondents watch the news and 13.7% like entertainment shows. Only 4.6% of the inhabitants of Craiova pay attention to cultural programs. As a result, the amount of programs that promote cultural values is low and therefore the literacy function of regional public broadcasters should be reassessed.

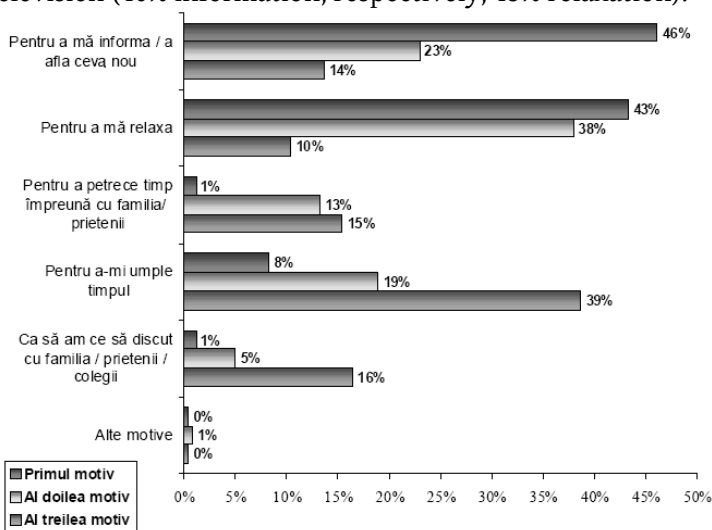
In conclusion, we can notice that, compared to previous years (2005-2009), 2010 is marked by a decreasing interest in cultural consumption in the Oltenia area and in Craiova, a process that has become more noticeable in subsequent years. Consequently, programs dedicated to traditions and religious issues have also lost the public impact.

Of great importance to this theme, the "Evaluation of the competence level in the media" report - Bucharest, June 2008 was conducted following a research that was developed within the "Do we have expertise in the media?"²⁴.

Some of the main conclusions of the above mentioned study can be linked to research findings previously stipulated by the CNA and the Oltenia Social Institute of the University of Craiova.

Television is the most popular medium of mass communication found in urban areas, most residents having at least one TV set.

Basically, the needs of young people related to information, relaxation and leisure determines media consumption. The need for information and the need to relax are the top reasons why young people watch television (46% information, respectively, 43% relaxation).



Baza: 280 (cei care se uită la TV)

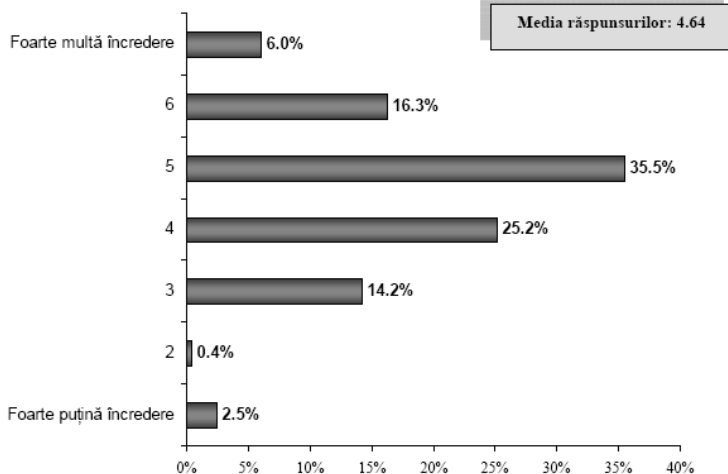
Figure 1. Reasons for watching TV

Source: Cultura Data, Cultural Consumption Barometer,

<http://www.culturadata.ro/Cercetari%20finalizate.html>, 2009.

The reason young people watch TV

The trust granted to information from the media is assessed by the respondents primarily by how it interacts with previously held knowledge.



Baza: 282 (total eșantion)

Figure 2. The level of trust in the media (A scale of 1 to 7; 1=very low, 7=very high)

Source: Cultura Data, Cultural Consumption Barometer, <http://www.culturadata.ro/Cercetari%20finalizate.html>, 2009.

There are different levels of trust among young people, the internet being ranked as most trustworthy, in second place - television, radio - in third and newspapers come last.

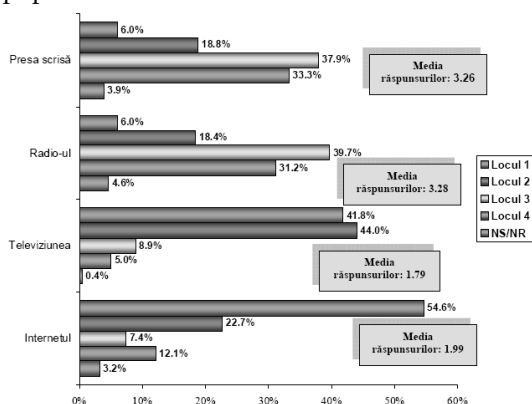


Figure 3. Levels of trust on various media

Source: Cultura Data, Cultural Consumption Barometer, <http://www.culturadata.ro/Cercetari%20finalizate.html>, 2009.

The level of trust in mass media

In a survey conducted by INSOMAR in three waves of analysis one can notice a decrease in audience for Radio Romania Oltenia Craiova, a regional public station.

A comparison with the impact of private radios (cumulative) illustrates RROC place on the media market: in 2009 - 45.7% for RROC, 30.7% for private radio stations. In wave 3 - 2012 RROC has a market share of 23.9% while private stations have a cumulative percentage of 35.6, almost as much as other sources of information, therefore RROC has less than 1/3 of the media audience in the area, much less than what it had in 2009. We present involution of RROC on the media market Oltenia, the 2009-2012 diachronic (in charts) and the public radio vs private radio “mirror” in the same period (the histograms).

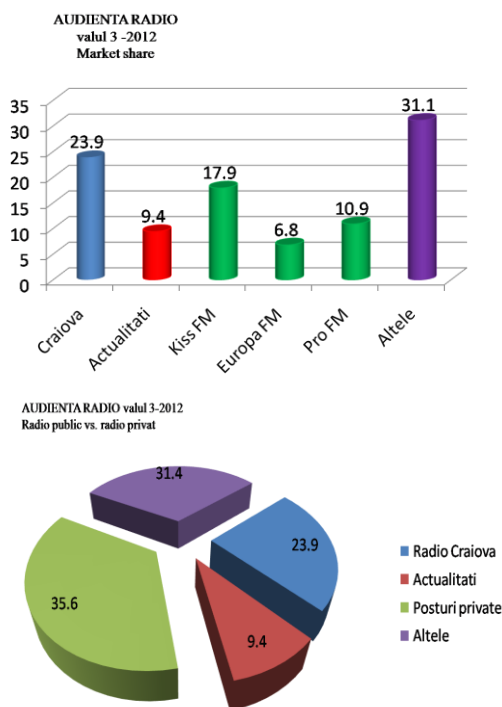


Figure 4. Radio audience, Wave 3 2012, Market share; Public Radio vs Private Radio
Source: our analysis, based on internal sources of the organisation (the Romanian Radio broadcasting Company), research carried out by INSOMAR, 2012.

The regional public radio has been the one that consistently transmitted religious themed programs and programs promoting cultural traditions. Fierce competition on the media market and the temptation to imitate the presentation style of private radio stations have generated a significant loss of audience. At the same time, some segments of certain types of shows, especially folk and religious themed have very high ratings

and a loyal audience (in the context of the analysis). The 06.00 pm-07.30 pm segment (which includes the news and folk music dedications) recorded values of 48.2 to 52.8, while cultural programs broadcast between 08.00 pm - 08.30 pm had audience ratings of 14.7 down to 12.0. This assembly of musical and cultural values should be noted, because these shows are in fierce competition with televised news programs (journals and debates).

Public radio has been and still is the promotion space of traditions and religious programs. Due to loss of public impact, these programs have now limited their airing space and therefore their persuasive broadcast illustrations. 60 minutes shows have been reconfigured to 30 minutes, and the approach has slid from the cultural to the informational style. To catch the attention of the audience shows were designed as narrative core with entertainment themes (unusual information from borderline fields) a fact noted by F. Champion: "The practice of the rites of passage (baptism, wedding, funeral) is only partially motivated re-leagues by religion, being mostly related to symbolic and historical landmarks in the construction of individual and collective identities. At this level of religious affiliation to the church, the exterior unit of the rites is fully compatible with a disconcerting diversity of beliefs, values and practices of the most different extractions (reincarnation, astrology, esoteric, parapsychology) concerning God, the soul, life after death and so on; obviously, they have very little in common with normative orthodoxy"²⁵.

Faith and beliefs, they work syncretically in a world that seeks the recovery of traditional values and religious beliefs, which milestone the presence of man marked by warmth and light, that is the love for his people and the world around him.

Notes:

¹ See reference works such as Mihai Coman, *Mass-media, mit și ritual. O perspectivă antropologică*, (Iași: Polirom, 2003); Nicu Gavriliuță, *Antropologie socială și culturală*, (Iași: Polirom, 2009); Sandu Frunză, *Comunicare simbolică și seducție. Studii despre seducția comunicării, comportamentul ritualic și religie*, (București: Tritonic, 2014); Cristina Gavriliuță, *The Everyday Sacred. Symbols, Rituals, Mythologies*, (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013).

² Mircea Eliade, *Aspecte ale mitului* (București: Editura Univers, 1978), 86-87.

³ Mircea Eliade, *Sacru și profanul* (București: Humanitas, 1992).

⁴ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008).

⁵ Gabriela Rusu-Păsărin, *Ice flowers*, Foreword by Acad. Stefan Ștefănescu, afterword by Gheorghe Oprea, (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc Foundation, 2004).

⁶ Nicolae Panea, *Orașul subtil*, (București: Editura Etnologică, 2013), 41.

⁷ Ioan Alexandru Tofan, „Social Norms and Religious Values on Secularization,” *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (2009): 9.

⁸ Sebastian Moraru, *Casa, satul și devenirea în tradiția românească* (București: Editura Saeculum Vizual, 2011), 23.

⁹ Vlad Gaivoronschi, *Matricele spațiului individual* (București: Editura Paideia, 2002), 68.

¹⁰ Virgil Ciomoș develops this idea in his volume *Time and Eternity* (București: Ed. Paideia, 1998).

¹¹ Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie. Cinci introduceri* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2007), 168.

¹² Sfântul Isaac Sirul, *Despre semnele și rodurile dragostei*, Filocalia 10 (București: 1981), 137.

¹³ Details in the study Gabriela Rusu-Păsărin, "Jurnalismul ecumenic. Particularități ale discursului radiofonic religios creștin", *Revista română de journalism și comunicare*, Anul III, nr. 3, Seria Nouă, (2008): 12-16.

¹⁴ Sandu Frunză, „Political Communication and the Median Space of Religious Experience,” *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, vol. 39 (2012): 176.

¹⁵ Delia Suiogan, *Simbolistica riturilor de trecere* (București: Ed. Paideia, 2006), 117.

¹⁶ Arhimandrit Veniamin Micle, *Inițieri catehetice*, (Sfânta Mănăstire Bistrița, Eparhia Râmnicului, 1993), 5.

¹⁷ Nicolae Panea, *Zei de asfalt. Antropologie a urbanului*, (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2001), 132.

¹⁸ R. Menahem, *La mort apprivoisée*, (Paris: Ed. Universitaire, 1973), 65.

¹⁹ Andrei Oișteanu, *Ordine și Haos. Mit și tradiție în cultura tradițională românească*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2013), 583.

²⁰ René Guénon, *Simbolismul crucii*, (București: Editura Herald, 2012), 202.

²¹ Anca Dohotariu, "Rituals and Religious Holidays and Their Representations among Young Unmarried Couples. A Qualitative Investigation Romania-France", *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*, vol. 39 (2012): 61.

²² Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Scutecele națiunii și hainele împăratului. Note de antropologie publică*, (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2013), 127.

²³ Florica Elena Laurențiu, *O carte a morții la români*, (Iași: Ed. Timpul, 2001), 14.

²⁴ A project implemented within the Media Education project launched by the ActiveWatch Press Monitoring Agency and funded by the Open Society Institute (OSI), London, UK . It also presents perceptions and opinions of young Romanian people on the influence of the media. (<http://www.mma.ro>).

²⁵ Francoise Champion, "Spiritul religios difuz, eclecticism și sincretisme", in Jean Delumeau, *Religiile lumii*, (București: Editura Humanitas, 1996), 700-728.

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