

Ernesto de Martino - Mircea Eliade Contrast

Aurelia Săbiescu

Ph.D. Student, University of Craiova, Craiova, Romania, aura79sabee@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: It is important to say that a decisive part within De Martino's process of intellectual becoming is represented both by the evolution of his thinking process starting from theories and concepts that he initially embraces, which he later abandons or nuances, but also by his relationship with other intellectuals, that is the dialogue he had with these and the extremely fruitful role of reciprocal criticism. It is what we actually find within the things exposed above. A remarkable thing to notice is the dialogue between Ernesto de Martino and Mircea Eliade. But before formulating some conclusive remarks of these reciprocal exchange of impressions and objections on the theoretical level regarding their implications on De Martino's work, it is important to bear in mind some substantial aspects of De Martino's major influences prior to his dialogue with Eliade. Starting from his initial argument, which he expressed when he was young, on the importance of the necessity of exploring the world of mystery, but also from the major loss of western thinking of ignoring this subject, De Martino structures his analytical work on Benedetto Croce's conceptual basis. After internalizing Croce's perspective on history, even on mystery, De Martino takes over on Croce's basic idea of the mystery's own existence as imaginary abstract category, which reason cannot define accurately, but particularly emphasizes on the western world accumulation of prejudices (pre-conceived ideas) on this topic. Moreover, De Martino notices the essence of Croce's idea, which he takes and applies conscientiously as methodologic landmark of his entire work: the fact that, the irrational, which is an intricate aspect linked to the "mystery" theme, operates on the level of history.

KEYWORDS: mystery, the irrational, history, abstract category, intellectual

Introduction

De Martino developed the theme of the magical world in a complete and clear way. Magic "helped to release the secular power of the intellect" (De Martino 1941, 74).

To Croce, essentially, history is the work of spirit, and this can only be fully known, by accessing all its component elements; without knowledge of human actions and thoughts, but especially of their profound resorts, within which mystery is also intertwined, historic knowledge will be only partially accomplished. He says: "Reality is history and nothing else" (Croce 2002, 59).

Another fundamental moment in De Martino's thinking is represented by his contact with Vittorio Macchioro's personality. He places mystery within religion and points out explicitly that the only way to knowledge is by experience (experimenting), not by abstract knowledge.

It is what is sedimenting in De Martino's mind and ultimately triggers his actions with a view to his field ethnologic researches and his endeavors to participative observation that he is going to accomplish within the rural communities of Italy. Macchioro begins from explaining the role of the shaman as a mediator of accomplishing access for mortals to the world "of the beyond" (Macchioro 1922, 79), thus appealing to the orphic myth, but also to the Christian elements of representation of the savior god, Jesus Christ.

De Martino distinguishes his approach from that of Macchioro as late as 1939, when he chooses to keep his option for a rationalistic approach, yet not abandoning the concept of mystery, but which he definitely chooses to place within the area of the manifestation of magic, of rite and religion thus staying faithful to Croce's influence, from this point of view. What is interesting to notice in De Martino's case is the fact that, in the particular case of magic, he keeps the analytical subjectivity taken from Macchioro, which he acknowledges as indispensable within the ritual practices.

But the point of separation between the two of them appears together with Macchioro's relentless opinion according to which any rational endeavor of analyzing the phenomenon of magic represents the very implicit loss of the essence of its knowledge, respectively, a degeneration of the authentic religious moment. As a matter of fact, staying in good personal relationships, and the plot unfolding only on the intellectual level, Macchioro is the one who introduces Mircea Eliade to De Martino, facilitating the very intense communication between his two disciples.

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Being intellectually closer to Macchioro, Mircea Eliade deepens his own conceptual instrumentary with an essential application in his study on yoga. Thus, De Martino gets to be interested not only in the subjects approached by Eliade, but also Macchioro himself facilitates the Romanian scientist's notoriety, both in Italy, and in other European countries. Moreover, Macchioro succeeds in establishing several fertile connections between Eliade's observations on Indian yoga and his own opinions on Greek antique Orphism.

But the moment of separation appears in 1948, when each of the two intellectuals publish their two fundamental works, within which they also include their confessions of manifesto type: De Martino's "Il mondo magico" (De Martino 2007, 48) and Eliade's "Techniques du yoga". The reciprocal reviews let out both praises and intense appreciation, but also divergent points of view, brought up especially by reflections on yoga.

The central points of the argument emerge together with De Martino's perspective on religious ritualism, which he considers a useful tool in the attempt of abolishing history, but which cannot be fully accomplished because of man's impossibility of surpassing his existential fate. De Martino practically severs, like a genuine Ockham razor, in a dichotomic manner, the historic world (which also includes the religious one) from the magic one. Through yoga he sees a confirmation of the failure of the religious paradox of not being able to conquer over the existential angst, whereas magic has a functionality of controlling the risk of missing being present.

Eliade responds to these remarks by verbally signaling "the insurmountable connection between magic and religious" (Eliade 1948, 72), between the co-existence of the two, and, implicitly, of the partial information of the theory of de-historization sustained by De Martino, respectively, of the distinction of strictly rational order, which the latter makes. Later, the argument between the two is going to focus on the rapport between Eliade's phenomenological-morphological position and De Martino's historicism.

As to historicism, Eliade does not hesitate to point out its limits, from the insufficient capacity of justifying and explain history, to the refuse of the profane time, which lost connection with the archetype area. If, according to Eliade, the two natures remain impossible to treat separately, to De Martino, these two will be dealt with as two histories, respectively, one as a religious historiography, and the other, as a religious vision on the world. Moreover, the religious de-historization theme becomes a real possibility of getting out of the crisis situation for Eliade, somehow, out of this world, whereas to De Martino, religion gets to create the sacred, by means of the rite, which is nothing else but a revealing factor of a crisis situation.

In addition to this, in De Martino's view, de-historization leads to liberation, reevaluating the beginning of the world but the effect produced is not an effective exit into another plan as opposed to the world, but both the effect, as well as the function of the myth remain fundamentally historic, although the mechanism itself of these is a de-historicizing one. In other words, for an even clearer understanding of De Martino's perspective, we are talking about a different situation towards history - of cultural rank (a need triggered by the angst of the crisis moments), - and not about an "exit" per se, out of the given history frame, such as Eliade skilfully arguments his perspective, in his analysis on the religious issue.

To Eliade, the religious fact cannot be reduced strictly to some historical lens of observation, without taking into account its multiple features of contents, especially of the archetypal value (inexhaustible, autonomous and innate) of this.

But, to De Martino, the angst, as an attack to presence, is not part of man's ontological structure, but represents a constitutive factor of existence itself, de-historicization being perceived as a simple mechanism of solving a crisis, and not treated as "ideology" through which we state an ontological status of man, which transcends the frames of history.

With Eliade, on the other hand, we need to understand that the ritual repetition of archetypes and the religion's capacity of assuring a real escape from history have got an effective ontologic status; this is, as a matter of fact, the central element that De Martino does not agree with. De Martino sees the historian's impossibility of freely accessing archetypes and therefore, of repeating the sacred in its archetypal form, other than through their form of successive manifestation in history.

Ultimately, it is in this dichotomic rapport that the intellectual tension core with Eliade lies, and beyond this theme, any other dealt with theoretical elements can be perceived as collateral. Still, we cannot overlook Eliade's major influence in De Martino's work within both his theory structures and his conceptual instruments.

A rather remarkable common point worth noticing with the two writers is the interesting approach towards the problems of the correspondences between parapsychology, ethnology and the history of religions, which were extensively researched by De Martino in his "Il mondo magico", but fiercely attacked by Eliade, thanks to Tylor and Frazer's influence regarding the favourable orientation for the study of magic and paranormal phenomena as effective realities, accessible to an analysis of objective sort. At the same time, we cannot ignore the importance of the rapport of the two great savants with regard to modernity, which helps even more in separating the two writers' concepts. I deal in detail with these aspects, focusing mainly on the moment of rupture, in which the two intellectuals (De Martino/Eliade) publish two fundamental works, in which they include their manifest confessions: "Il mondo magico" by De Martino and Eliade's "Techniques du Yoga". Mutual reviews reveal both intense praise and appreciation, but also delimitation points, born especially along with the reflections on yoga.

The central points of the dispute emerge with De Martino's perspective on religious ritualism, which he considers a useful tool for trying to "abolish history", but which cannot be fully realized due to man's inability to overcome his existential condition. De Martino practically cuts, like a real razor of Ockham, in a dichotomous way, the historical world (which also includes the religious one), from the magical one.

Through yoga, he sees a confirmation of the failure of the religious paradox of not being able to overcome existential anxiety, while magic still has a function of controlling the risk of losing presence. Eliade responds to these observations by pointing out, however, the insurmountable connection between magic and religion, between the coexistence of the two and, implicitly, the partial refutation of De Martino's theory of dehistoricization, respectively the strictly rational distinction that the latter makes.

Subsequently, the controversy between the two will focus on the relationship between Eliade's phenomenological-morphological position and De Martino's historicism. In terms of historicism, Eliade does not hesitate to present its limits, from the insufficient capacity to justify and explain history, to the refusal of profane time, which has lost touch with the area of archetypes. Moreover, the theme of religious de-historicization becomes for Eliade a real possibility to get out of the crisis situation, in an outside the world position, while, for De Martino, religion ends up creating the sacred, through the rite, which is nothing but a reveller of the crisis situation; moreover, for De Martino, dehistoricization leads to liberation, revaluing the data of the world, but the actual effect produced is not an effective exit in another plane to the world, but both the effect and the function of the myth remain fundamentally historical, although their actual mechanism is a dehistorical one.

In other words, for an even clearer understanding of De Martino's perspective, we are talking about a different situation from history - of a cultural nature (a need triggered by the anguish of moments of crisis) - and not of a proper "exit" from the frames of the given history, as Eliade skillfully argues his perspective, in his analysis of the religious.

Conclusions

If, in De Martino's case, modernity is dealt with almost ideologically, meaning that De Martino admits modernity's full capacity of knowledge, to Eliade modernity becomes rather a hinder in understanding phenomena, and, when it refers to myth and to the central functionality that the symbol has, Eliade sees modernity as just a simple surpassing of the traditional.

Yet, there is a series of common points between Eliade and De Martino, noticed especially through the theories that De Martino takes over from Eliade, when this one tries to explain the mechanism of sending, through symbol and rite, to the meta-historic plan, although the Italian scientist continues to see the symbol as a simple accomplishment of the value plan, produced under cultural stimulus.

Through the work he leaves behind and the innovation of his forays as a pioneering researcher and true intellectual, De Martino remains a prolific culture maker and a pioneer in the field of ethno-anthropology, who can still contribute in a remarkable extent, including the development of the research in the field, continuing to stimulate, in a substantial way, those interested who want to follow his path.

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