

A Parallel Study of Romanian and Italian Traditional Culture

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ABSTRACT: Through his enduring work and innovative forays as a pioneering researcher and true intellectual, De Martino remains a prolific culture maker and a pioneer in the field of ethno-anthropology, contributing to a remarkable extent, including advancing research in the field and continuing to stimulate, in a substantial way, those interested in following his path. In addition to his vast theoretical background, De Martino's genuine personality has always guided him to a form of knowledge based on experience, with his field research developing innovative methodological approaches - even through the integration of new technologies - confirming De Martino as a true guide in applied ethnological research. Through the extensive use of photography as an essential tool for critical analysis of scientific evidence, all research techniques undergo transformation. The author advocates for the necessity of expanding the study of De Martino's work within Romanian academia, particularly focusing on the relationship of the Italian scholar with Romanian folklore, treated and viewed in comparison with the forms of manifestation of Italian popular culture. In this exploration, fascinating aspects and similarities of tarantism with the ritual elements of the Romanian Căluș can be detected. The *Căluș* dance, included in UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2005), stands as an important national emblem and a symbol of Romanian identity.

KEYWORDS: Romanian folklore, tarantism, Romanian *căluș*

The concept of tradition

When it comes to popular culture, we think of that culture specific to rural, traditional, archaic, premodern societies, its artistic expression being folklore. Each nation is characterized by a particular behavior, certain traditions, a specific physiognomy and a particular cultural pattern. On the level of popular culture, the ethical, moral, fundamental and basic values are developed, along with the basic mythologies of a group, and the attempts to understand the world are being formed. The language of every nation is also formed and developed, as well as the common knowledge concerning the world around us. With respect to such archaic popular culture, we discover certain characteristics, namely: the anonymous and collective character (the popular creation does not belong to an individual, it is not its property and it may be emphasized in time); the spontaneous and oral, as well as the integral nature (the artistic manifestations, such as dance, music, popular clothing, form a unique cultural element, they are not shifted, the popular culture includes both the material and the spiritual culture).

With modernization, this popular culture loses this integral nature; it appears that organized folklore transforms into a form of entertainment, a product. It acquires the particularities of an industrial product with a specific market and consumers. Through the loss of the integral character, we notice how the artists customize their works; they attend qualification courses and different craft schools, they are no longer anonymous, and the popular culture becomes, over time, part of the mass culture, with these two notions being synonymous in works of certain American sociologists.

Fundamentally, tradition means a plurality of all customs, traditions, beliefs, and conceptions historically rooted in some social groups, perpetuated through generations by word of mouth, for a nation or a social group being its individual characteristic. In Latin, tradition entails the transmission of some cultural values, keeping alive in the memory of a group the historical past. In particular, this concept may be regarded as a psycho-social phenomenon providing for the participation of one's own system of rather stable spiritual and

material values. There is another conceptual delimitation, namely the tradition as continuity and, according to Ovidiu Papadima, “tradition is also a manner of living, not only of thinking of Romanian peasant.” (Papadima 1995, 9). The traditional culture is marked by a permanent attempt of man to create a universe of symbols and signs, to conquer the unknown world and discover its complexity.

The tradition is related to the concept of creation, in terms of complexity and unity, as well as a “different phenomenon, it also entails the psychical, logical and abstract level.” (Blaga 1981, 80). The cultural creation provides dignity to traditional man, being an “occasion of personal assertion” (Rădulescu Motru 1995, 142).

Traditional Practices in Romanian and Italian Cultures

Human existence may be depicted based on its significant aspects, respectively: birth, marriage, and death. The traditional culture of a nation relies on certain moral virtues, on different cultural elements of special importance, on a system generously charged with customs. By focusing on values and essences, the Romanian tradition seems to belong to the same history. The village is also a vocation: it has thus crystallized the destiny of a nation beyond its image that expresses the traditional ethnicity.

The Romanian traditional culture includes customs, folklore, popular art and ceremonial, namely all our traditional inheritance. This phenomenon of traditional culture may be considered “the first significant cultural synthesis appeared in the Romanian space” (Ghise 1985). It starts from the questions that the man of old communities asked himself with respect to the human condition, nature, and the signification of it in time, appointing to a popular philosophical knowledge permanently present in the spiritual pattern of Romanian society, a significant part being represented by how the man of such traditional communities was referring to time. There is a historical time opposite to the mythical time, that archetypal element by which each representation of existence on earth is justified, a time of “repeatability, focused on the sources of spiritual creation that determine the man to actually reexperience the genuine purity” (Cristea 1979, 72). This mythical time returns to the ritual recall of the past, to the beginnings. As Romus Vulcănescu used to say, the calendar does not measure only the time but, mainly, the “chromocratic spirits and divinities” (Vulcănescu 1985, 19)

The passing from the world of common people, including life and its feelings to the transcendent world, relatively unconditioned, to eternity, respectively the placing of man in the mythical time, take place only on key, significant moments, namely during significant events of man’s life and rituals. What is important is the intuition in the popular universe gives place to the mythical vision of time. The sacred time is the time of celebrations. In the traditional communities, different magical-mythological practices that structure the traditions and beliefs appear and succeed in time. In the traditional mindset, the profane and sacred time are complementary, they are not suddenly separated. Depending on the moon’s cycle, the magical-mythical rites of fecundity and fertility are established.

Each people entail historical evolution clearly involving the tradition. As proven by experience, it is a “condition of cultural progress” (Vianu 1982, 249-250), except for a background of values less obvious, as well as an alive value-creating background. The Romanian tradition includes the Romanian vision of the world, the traditional man is placed in an alive works, in history and culture, in the universe, in a specific existence. The tradition is alive, it is not a frozen image, but representative in terms of values, and it is an archive of values, considering the future historical evolution.

The author developed this article focused on both the fascination with the strong personality of De Martino, but also being interested, for a long time, with interest and curiosity, to the cultural-identity aspects of the traditional societies found in folklore, popular culture or in the representations of mythical nature, actively present as existential

manifestation in the world of the village, for a while, even after the beginning of the modern era. It is easy to notice that the analysis tools developed and used by Ernesto de Martino to study his cultural area of origin, in this case, the Italian, can also serve the academic environment in Romania, which already has, for a long time, a recognized tradition in the field of sociological research, in this case, ethnological and anthropological, developed by important personalities, founders of the School of Sociology in the interwar period, such as Dimitrie Gusti or Henri Stahl. I was able to see the relationship between tarantism and the elements of Romanian folklore (on which De Martino turned his attention with great interest).

In fact, De Martino's preoccupation with the Romanian lament ritual, the scientist can reflect carefully on the meanings of the crisis of mourning, burial and mourning. De Martino fully contributed by innovating the methods of taking folk material: the reform of ethnological studies.

In fact, De Martino treats with deep and detailed analysis the concept of "magic", which De Martino seeks to find its roots rather in the concrete world of the village, which he discovers in Lucania, with the beginning of the "southern" phase research of the great anthropologist and entologist.

Thus, the captured aspects are brought together in the form of subtle analyzes and observations where the central issue is represented by the theme of pain, expressed by the ritual of mourning, a Mediterranean rite prior to Christianity, which marks the confrontation with the existential crisis, but which also finds a "solution" by the process of dehistoricization, by placing the very existence in a mythical-ritual dimension. De Martino fully contributed by innovating the methods of taking folk material. The latter is more profoundly understood in the description of the days dedicated to the field research, in which De Martino studies ad locum tarantism and the aspects that this ancient custom encompasses, guaranteeing solutions to the "crisis of presence". From this point of view, the magic of traditional societies can be perceived as a compass in understanding the primordial representations of the world.

UNESCO included the *căluș* ritual in its heritage list and was proclaimed a "Masterpiece of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" (in 2005), then, in 2008, the *căluș* was included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This dance is considered to be one of the most energetic, dynamic and impressive treasure piece in the Romanian folk culture. The *căluș* was included in the repertory of each Romanian folklore ensemble. The modern version of this dance is mainly determined by its unconventionality, especially when it comes to the dance composition, presenting higher virtuous qualities. The dance is not only performed on a feast day, but on every regular festival event as well.

The National Festival "*Călușul Românesc*" ("*The Romanian Căluș*") opened the door to a lasting typical dance choreography from one generation to the next. The *căluș* dance is the oldest, most intricate form of ritualistic choreography in Romania, including practices and magic charms which are used following a very strict tradition. Is considered to be an outstanding dance performance in the Romanian folklore, the *căluș* does not solely denote a typical symbol of national identity, but an ancient custom, deep-rooted in mythology.

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