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**RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON DURING SOCIALISM IN THE VILLAGES
FROM BACĂU AREA**

(abstract)

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Keywords: Csango, religion, religious movements, ritual, anthropology of religion, social transformation, crisis, communism, postcommunism, dream, vision.

Synthesis of the major parts

Among the topics of the thesis are the religious mentality of the Moldavian Csangos, the rites and experiences that enable the vivid communication with the transcendental, the visionary forms of the communication with the transcendental, the aspirations of the religious people to experience the transcendental as a direct, palpable reality which offers guidance in the restoration of their lives, helping them resolve their problems. The thesis will also elaborate on the context in which the experience of the transcendental truly has/had relevance, on the historically challenged functions of the religious experience through visions and dreams, on the role of the clerically unsupervised religiousness in the time of the communist dictatorship, in the time of social threats and in the period after the fall of communism.

But why is it worth dealing with phenomenon that are part of a disappearing mentality and world view, phenomenon which in many respects can be considered peripheral in a rapidly capitalizing country, in a region undergoing fast modernization, yet still considered as being “fallen behind”. I believe the answers to this question are the following:

1. Because these phenomenon are part of the same religious system of interpretations, through the research of dreams and visions we can understand different aspects of the role of religiousness in the times of the communist dictatorship in highly disadvantaged rural regions.

2. I believe that through our research we have come closer to understanding the influence of religion in the functioning of social behavioral patterns in certain historical-ideological life situations.

3. The emergence of these experiences and their adjacent social reactions hold such meanings and facilitate the functioning of such religious exercises, that their interpretation can lead to the understanding of the changing religiousness of the period immediately after the regime change of 1989. These experiences, in the context of economic, social, political and religious transformation, have remained vital components of the Romanian post-communist religious vista.

In my opinion, the two most important contexts of the investigation of religious experiences are its socio-cultural (the social and political frame of the local religious traditions during and after the socialist regime) and its subjective (individual, cognitive) aspects.

I have begun my dissertation with the presentation of the most important international scientific literature dealing with religious anthropology, which I've used as guidelines for my investigations. First I have attempted the presentation of Harvey Whitehouse's theory of modes of religiosity (including its literary antecedents) and also the literature that tests the aforementioned theory. Harvey Whitehouse speaks of two tendencies within religions, doctrinal and imagistic religiousness, which have different socio-cultural aspects. Doctrinal religiousness includes systematically occurring, codified rites that rely on repetition, their content being constant but the amount of individual involvement within them is low. Imagistic religiousness has sporadic, small scale rites which can stir up intense emotions. Doctrinal religiousness is calmer, more organized, imagistic religiousness being far more emotional and personal. Within doctrinal religiousness, ritual places are bound to the religious teachings and to the institutional rites that need to be frequently activated due to the fact that the doctrines and sacred texts would not be memorized and learned if they were presented on seldom occasions only.

I have used this model in establishing the general frame of the arguments of my dissertation, concerning the social and historical aspects of the religious experience. Utilising Harvey Whitehouse's model as a more general frame I have tried to define the role of the local religious traditions in the time of the socialist regime and also to elaborate on what kind of changes had occurred after the fall of the regime in the society of the Moldavian Csangos.

The more comprehensive goal of this thesis was the understanding of how the Csango's religious definition of the world functioned within the circumstances of a „double modernity” (the „technical modernization” of socialism and the „global modernization” of the post communist era). I have tried to answer the question on how , since the second part of the 20th century until the present, has the imagination responsible for manifesting the religious patterns of culture accomplish its role in

articulating the reoccurring dramas of social change and everyday life. Another goal was understanding the role of the visionary forms of religious experience within the Csango's religious definition of the world. In this endeavour I have used two main approaches: on one hand I have investigated the socio-cultural aspects of the religious experiences and tried to understand their connection to the social-political processes of the period. The other level of the analysis involved the interpretation of the cognitive aspects and individual frames of religiousness.

During the analysis I have used the hypothesis that the visionary experiences of the socialist and post-communist periods were part of a larger socio-historical process that involved the transformation of religion. I have attempted to present my views in a more general religion anthropologic theoretic frame that integrated all the psychological, social and political aspects of religion into one single model. In his theory on religious models Harvey Whitehouse has stressed the superior relevance of the connection between cognitive and social processes.

In my paper I have examined such manifestations of popular religiousness which in many cases represented the religious context of conformation or transformation in the communist period and in the period immediately following its end. In this respect I try to integrate into my argumentation historical, cultural, social, economical and psychological observations concerning a broader context of religious life. With the use local religious manifestation I have examined general problems that deal with the role and place of religion during the time of social changes. With the examination of the connections between social change in times of crisis and religiousness I tried to bring my contribution to the understanding of the Moldavian Csangos society.

During the socialist era, desperation caused by social oppression could sometimes manifest itself through movement-like religious activities. Stimulated by oppressive forces, religious imagination and individual creativity manifested itself independently from the Catholic Church through religious dreams and visions. Dream and vision were culturally accepted forms of local religious traditions, articulating individual and collective crisis situations on the outer borders of religious institutions.

The examined rural communities usually had no intellectuals and were formed mainly by former farmers who with the advent of communism migrated towards lease-work. In a chapter I tried to present the way in which socialism transformed this society and how the local communities reacted to the change. I also presented the involvement of the state in the local life of the communities (referring to literature on the research of socialism).

Researchers of christianity explain the modern Virgin Mary apparitions of the 20th century through social-political tensions, caused especially by communism and the cold-war threat. In an Eastern-European context, Virgin Mary apparitions of the post-communist era are considered countermeasures to modernity and secularisation, collective answers to severe social problems (ex Clough–Mitchell 2001, Valtchinova 2004, 2007).

The stimulating force of fear and social insecurity on religious activity were demonstrated by researchers of religious movements within post-colonial societies (ex Worsley 1967, Cohn 1957), research dealing with demonic possession (ex Sluhovsky 2007, Kapferer 2004), and witch-trials (see Muchembled [szerk.] 1997, Pócs 1999, Henningsen 1990, Behringer 1997, Ankarloo–Henningsen [eds.] 1990).

Visions as religious phenomenon, are subject of a wide range of theoretical anthropological research, stretching from comparative historical anthropology, religious psychology, neurobiology to the most recent cognitive anthropological approaches. Along with the cultural components of these phenomenon, certain authors stress the importance of drawing the functioning and interior laws of the communities, integrating them into a historical perspective on wider social levels. In more recent times, with the growing popularity of cognitive approaches to anthropology, the research of visions has examined individual motivations and cognitive processes as part of a „personal religiousness” (James 2002:28). These approaches follow the logical thread that stresses the importance of human fantasy and creativity within the examination of religious phenomenon in a far more pronounced way than any previous approaches (see Boddy 1994: 427, Raposa 1999, Barth 1995).

Anthropological researchers dealing with the transformation of religion during the socialist period have come to the conclusion that imagistic religiousness was the more suitable mode of adapting and coping with crisis situations. These researchers stated that due to the constant attacks upon religious institutions, there was a so-called „domestication” of religion (lásd Dragadze 1993). This process led to the migration of religion from the public towards the private, wherein the importance of the individual and his creativity grew in the communication with the transcendental (például Valtchinova 2004, 2007). Elements of imagistic religiousness were present in the Csango communities even prior to the socialist period, functioning much in the same way as they did during communism and in the period of transition.

In my opinion, the ethnographical material examined in the thesis demonstrates that the oppressive force of the communist regime upon the Csango society led to the manifestation of several imagistical religious exercises, including dreams of religious content, individual and public visions, all of which happened outside the control of religious institutions. Imagistic rites emerging in the crisis situation of the communist era were means of expressing individual and community happenings. The millennial and apocalyptic visions of these movement-like religious activities became stimulants for opposing the social threats posed by the oppressive political regime.

The imagistic ritual activities emerging free of institutional control created solidarity and hope against the government and helped in dealing with individual and community problems, and also helped in coping with new situations. The constraints applied to religious life, the tendencies to push religion outside the public, resulted in the cultivation of a much tighter relationship with the transcendental, which, along with the intensity of personal religious experiences, also created new forms of religious exercises.

This enhanced religious activity, which easily adhered to specific needs, thrived in the sporadic, small communities of family and neighborhood which shared strong cohesion and common identity based on mutual trust. Imagistic religiousness could more easily be hidden within the private spheres of these smaller social formations. This mode of keeping religious legacy was uncovered in Moldavia much in the same way as it happened in other countries under the influence of the former Soviet Union.

Religion also became the primary method of adapting to the new historical environment. Through its cultural symbols and metaphors it reevaluated the individual's position within a rapidly changing social environment. Large emphasis fell on the imagistic rites and visionary forms of transcendental communication in expressing community crisis situations.

Social imagination held an important role in the emergence of crisis vision and dreams. These imagistic experiences helped in the symbolic representation of the historical situation and the religious expression of social imagination. In these vision and dreams, the most important episodes of national and local history appeared. The historization of imagination created the long lasting forms of approaching to the past.

Within the relations of post-socialism, the relevance of religion grew in the public sphere, also becoming more open towards the assimilation of transnational influences (Hann 2006: 2). Imagistic religiousness had an impact on the reinstitutionalisation of the post-communist era religion. Researchers working in the satellite states of the former Soviet Union have demonstrated that doctrinal rites and imagistic religious forms were both present in post-socialist times, when the Church tried to integrate the secularised religious forms of the communist period. The symbolic punishing rites, exorcisms, revelations through visions and dreams, the different forms of magic were institutionalised not only by the orthodox but also by the Moldavian Catholic Church.

After the 1989 fall of the communist government, in the effort of expanding its institutions, the Moldavian church initiated the beatification of a doctor from Trunk, whose tragic story became the base of a religious movement that united the Moldavian villages. In the progress of this religious movement that emerged within the cross section of traditional religiousness with magical healing, religion and politicum, we can discover the characteristics of the imagistic religiousness modelled by Harvey Whitehouse: the spontaneous, emotionally stirring rites that relied heavily on religious imagination and individual creativity.

In the period after the change of regime, Romania entered the many tendencies of globalization, tendencies that influenced the formerly secluded, introverted Csango regions heavily as well. In Moldavia, the migration towards working abroad and the transnational lifestyles drastically altered the traditional religious exercise and the role of

religion. Within the expanding geographical scope of working in foreign countries, new places of vision based shrines became available to the Csangos on both national and international levels.

Global tendencies contributed therefore to the mass gathering of this traditional ethnical group at the apparition of Virgin Mary at Seuca, which in a few short years entered the ranks of the national places of pilgrimage. Seuca represents a particular spot on the Csangos' pilgrimage-map, among the places established by the Moldavian catholic church in the post-communist period.

In contrast with the formerly described forms of vision-activity (short, spontaneous religious events within few villages) common in socialist times, the apparition of Virgin Mary at Seuca is the first modern event of its kind where Moldavian Csangos were present. This case exemplifies many aspects of the religious changes of the post-communist period, as found in scientific literature: religious events gain more public emphasis, a stronger sense of institution religiousness, a stronger embedding of the local worlds into the transnational framework and the integration of the visions into a doctrinal religiousness.

During the post-socialist period, Csango society is greatly influenced by the effects of modernization. The local world of Csangos becomes less of a „cultural island”, the lives of the Moldavian villages become governed more and more by the transnational, global forces described by George E. Marcus and Michel J. Fischer, where the former traditional methods of religious exercises are changed as well (Marcus–Fischer 1986, Marcus 1995). The presence of the Moldavian Csangos at the apparition of Virgin Mary at Seuca is a good example of the coming together of the transnational, national and local levels of religiousness.

Recent papers of religion-anthropology emphasise the cognitive processes of individual religiousness and the role of individual creativity, experience, subjectivity and emotions on the emergence of the religious experience. I tried to explain the emergence of the Csangos' visions during the Pentecostal sun-watching with the role of the ritualized acts in facilitating the intense emotional religious experience. I demonstrated how the Csangos participated in both imagistic and doctrinal rites during their Pentecostal pilgrimage. This multivalent religiousness is capable of changing the psychological state

of the rite's participants (Turner 1995) and creates the strong emotions that permeate the ritual transitions (Mitchell 1997). This leads us to the conclusion that the subjective and creative aspects of the imagistic religiousness can occur even inside the codified boundaries of the personal religiousness.

I attempted to present the switching between the doctrinal and imagistic rites of the Harvey Whitehouse model through the examination of the circumstances during the Csangos' Pentecostal sun-watching and its' adjacent visions. I focused on how individual creativity can function and integrate into the community religious activities on the edges, but not independent of, institutionalized religiousness.

Through examining the visionary forms of communicating with the transcendental we can get a glimpse at the importance of the imagination that visualises the religious patterns of culture, within the traditional, sacral culture. Examining the role of these religious experiences in everyday life we can see that they can be part of the private religiousness as well, and they play a major role mostly on the areas that cannot be fully institutionalized by the church. The great dramatic existential events of life (pregnancy, sickness, old age, loneliness, death) are the driving force of the surviving forms of individual sacral communication and imagistic experiences of the Moldavian Csangos.

Several of the researchers dealing with the many religious processes of the socialist and post-socialist period emphasise the importance of researching the individual (religious specialists and common everyday participants). Going along this guideline I have attempted to understand the subtle changes within the religious landscape of the socialist and post-socialist period through examining the visionary forms of communication with the transcendental. I tried to demonstrate that due to the fact that these visionary forms are part of a religious explanatory system, studying them can help us understand more about the important role of religion within the complex structure of the interaction between individual and social reality.

