

Rezumat (în limba engleză) al tezei de doctorat

RITUAL ȘI SPAȚIU FUNERAR ÎN CÂMPIA TRANSILVANIEI

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SUMMARY

In this paper I have investigated the events that are part of the sphere of the death phenomenon in the Transylvanian Plains area. The stake was not monographic. Two things made me chose to observe and analyze these things. The first thing is the book “The funerary grammar” by Nicolae Panea, in which the author divides death into three situations: a) death as a fulfilment (regular death); b) death as a crisis (persons that died before their time); c) impure death (death that came in deviant or abnormal situations).

I explored this funerary eventful triad starting from the examples I encountered in the field. In the documentation faze of the paper, the descriptive after the fact interviews, with a relative (and fake) reconstitutive unity / uniformity of the facts, took second seat to direct, in the field observations, the so called in *vivo observation of death*.

I was present, by myself or as part of a team, whenever I could, at funerals, memorial services, and family or community commemorations.

The second thing that sparked my interest in research was the space. I’ve set my goals in following the funerary rituals set at the intersection with the cultural space coordinates in its symbolic attributes dynamic, what is the connection between the funerary rituals and their space, how they create and alter (disturb, alter, affect), trough their investiture, spaces with funerary attributes that can be permanent, constant, invariant, or temporary, being part of the ritualistic scene of one or another moment.

Also like, some spaces, trough their inherent funerary connotation, demand, need the proper ritual, at certain times. There are always correlations and determinations between ritual, space and time, determinations that allow reversible movement between the profane and sacred plans, between here and there.

The act of death traces an organized body of habits that are troubleing trough their depth and stability such as: preparation of the body, the care for the souls path, its new condition, especially during the forty days marked by the obstacles of the journey to the other world, culminating the individual judgement and entering into a new order.

These practices contribute to the status change and the adapting process to the new condition, all the ritual forms and acts converge towards the same goal.

For the first category, death as a fulfilment, I started from two examples of elderly persons (man and woman), for which the passing on closed naturally the cycle of life, their destiny on earth, at 75, respectively at 90 years of age.

An important part of the paper concentrates on what Nicolae Panea calls “death as a fulfilment”, meaning death that occurred as a natural ending of the cycle of life, at the end of a full life. I exemplified two cases: a 76 years old man from Triteni and 90 years old woman from the village of Urca. Triteni is the birth place of the writer Pavel Dan.

Direct observation of the two burials and later interviews allowed me to make a sequential ethnographic presentation that I considered necessary in order to inventorize the multitude of gestures the ritualic scheme and the deployment of the social dramaturgy that they imply, triggers such events. The fact that Pavel Dan is native from Triteni allowed me, considering his novels as a source, to compare ritualistic realities of the same topos, a century apart (the beginning of the XXth century- the beginning of the XXIst century). The conclusion: Although Pavel Dan did not mean to be an ethnographer, many of the aspects that he wrote down remain valid both as a script and in beliefs, the collective mind. Other rituals have been subjected to an inherent dynamics or to a paradigm change. Even the fact that Pavel Dan does not mention in his writings the tree in the funerary ritual may be a proof that at that time, the tree was not part of a generalized cycle, being used only in the case of young people, probably the unmarried ones, as a part of the wedding-into-death scenario. Pavel Dan describes only funerals for old people, meaning fulfilled death.

After the burials, I watched the alms/ the charity time, which coincide with the one year moaning period. After this moment, the dead stops being the family's deceased and becomes an elder of the community, meaning that he genealogically becomes an ancestor, a protective spirit. The relations with the ancestors belong to another registry, governed by rituals, at a community level. Necessary contacts between the living and the dead take place periodically, according to well established rituals. At certain times, the barriers between the worlds brake open and the ancestors' souls return home. On these occasions, the whole community space becomes on one side, a place of hospitality, and, on the other side, a space

secured by defensive gestures against evil and unwanted spirits which may jeopardize the community peace.

After the Second World War, Romania entered under the USSR political and military sphere of influence, which led to the installation of the communist government. The years that followed many Romanian citizens who didn't agree with the new regime or its ideology were subjected to terror and repression. Any person suspected of being an enemy of the people would end up in political jails or put to death through summary executions.

But there were also people who stood up to the regime. Groups of partisans emerged which withstood many years in forests and mountains for many years, standing up to Securitatea, the repressive instrument of the state. After the fall of the communist regime, the former enemies of the people, victims of repression, benefited from reconsideration and rehabilitation that transformed them into anticommunist heroes. A series of commemorative actions that start a new postcommunist tradition constitutes a part of the process called politics of memory.

The book "The Political Life of Dead Bodies" by Katherine Verdery represents a reference study in this field at international level. The examples that the American anthropologist applies her theories on refer either to elites, meaning personalities whose posthumous glory is rewritten through commemorative actions or tragic events of war, when anonymous individuals were executed. Many of them were victims of horrific atrocities (ethnic cleansings), where the media impact came from the genocide dimension, from mass murder, which places these actions in the category of crimes against humanity. In these cases, the executioners, who are the responsible for perpetrating these actions, benefit from a sad celebrity.

At history's judgement, the victims benefit from unearthing and identifying actions; actually, more likely inventory and counting actions meant to reconstitute though evidence, the dimension of the crimes. This evidence will be used as incriminating facts in order to prove and convict the executioners. At the same time, the commemorative actions of a large number of victims may, through the representative voices of the survivors' descendants, reopen symbolically the wounds, cultivate trauma, demonize the Other (as a collective character, the Others), identify the Scapegoat.

My research aims at showing how these theories, these mechanisms remain valid, apply and work also in the case of some people who were victims of communist repressions through isolated and almost anonymous executions. The murder was committed in silence and the murdered is condemned to being forgotten. The exhumation and reburial also remain events with local reverberations.

Nevertheless, in these local circumstances, different social actors and their interests interfere in the organization of the commemorative ritual. Representatives of various political, social and cultural institutions negotiate their ratio of forces, transforming this event into a competitive ground in which their interests prevail

Death as a crisis. For the third category, death as a crisis, I chose the case a 26 year old man who died as a result of a tragic accident. His funeral transformed the funerary ritual into a real wedding of the dead, event that shook all the community of the village Plopis, Salaj county, in the fall 2010.

The death as a crisis refers to the case when the act of dieing cuts short an unfulfilled life, meaning destinies that did not have time to travel through the three basic rites of passage: birth (baptize), wedding, funeral. There are many references to the wedding of the dead, but there are few studies dedicated to the subject. Of course, a place apart is held by embracing the spiritual option of the shepherd from the “Miorita” ballad. He describes to himself the transformation of death into wedding through the last will and testament left to his wonder sheep. There are two important studies. The first one belongs to Henri Stahl, who wrote the book entitled ‘Death and Funeral in the Northern Gorj’ as a result of some field research that he made in 1935 in Oltenia (Gorj), where he had the opportunity to participate as an observer to the funeral of a teenage boy of 16 years. Stahl describes the unveiling of the ritual, with a mixture between the wedding props overlapped with the funerals. The purpose of this mixed ritual is to resolve a conflict state. To die single represent a dangerous death because the most important fact of life remains unachieved. As a consequence, a symbolic wedding of the dead takes place.

If a person from this category dies, two actions must be taken: the person must be married and then properly buried. The wedding of the dead solves both. It is believed

that, if a symbolic wedding is not made during the funerals, the dead person will come back to find his mate.

Stahl focuses on the complex habit of the funerary tree, which, in the wedding of the dead context, in Northern Oltenia gets to the most elaborated forms of significance and dramatic representation (chopping off in the woods, meeting the tree, the tree song, decorating the tree, the Dawns, the trip, placing it at the grave as a spear).

The second reference study dedicated to the wedding of the dead phenomenon was undertaken in the last quarter of the XXth century by Gail Kligman and manifested in the well known book "Wedding of the dead". The research grounds are in northern Transylvania, Maramures. Kligman focuses on the mystery of this special ritual (why it is carried out?) and places it in a wider context, underlying the fact that it is encountered under various forms not just in Romania, but also in other parts of the world with the same purpose: the unfulfilled destiny need to be repaired through compensation. What was not done in life must be recovered at the meeting with death so that the person can take the road of no return fulfilled.

Moreover, she makes schematical level comparisons between the wedding ritual and the funerary ritual, underlying that exactly the existence of parallel significances allows attaching wedding-into-death, so that the mixed ritual maintains sense and coherence. If Stahl had the opportunity provided by the field to elaborate the motif of the tree, Mrs. Kligman's attention was drawn to the presence of the flag. The wedding flag is integrated into the funerals, but touching death contaminates it. The flag is mourned. The dead's treeThe presence of the tree, especially of the fir in a physical, concrete aspect or symbolized on different objects or invoked in folk productions (songs, carols, ovals, moaning) accompanies the man's life from birth until death, in all the great limits and passing rituals. Thus, in the area of research people used to plant a tree in the garden when a child was born. The same thing happened when a new house was built; as part of the foundation rituals, a twig or a trunk of green fir was put on the top of the roof. This practice was spread in the whole country and on a much vaster area.

Among the arsenal of the symbolic objects used in the wedding ceremonial, beside the flag one encounters the fir meant to adorn the gate

through which the grooms will get out the yard and get into the world. But the richest presence of the tree can be encountered in the dead related customs. We will present three hypostases of this presence of the tree within the funeral framework.

A1. The fir which accompanies the funeral ritual. It is used when a young, unmarried lad dies. In the last decades, this practice was spread equally to men and women, no older than 40, either married or unmarried. The fir is cut from the forest during the night, by a group of lads. Their number has to be odd, either 9 or 3. They have to ground the fir by 9 strokes of hatchet.

When they bring the fir they are welcomed at the village entrance by a group of hired mourners who interpret a special song of funeral ritual named the song of the fir.

At the dead's house, the fir is adorned by some girls with colored ribbons, bells, etc. The lads cup up the bark of the fir in spiral. Some researchers associate this spiral with the ascendant path that the soul of the dead will have to follow. Other researchers associate this spiral with the snake, a divinity that protects the house.

This spiral is adorned as well by the girls with a twisted woolen strip. The fir must be kept in the dead's yard until the funeral. On the way to the cemetery, the fir must be placed at the head of the funeral procession, after the cross. On the way from the forest to the grave the fir is carried only by men, being kept in a horizontal position, with its point forward. After the coffin is placed in the grave, the fir is fixed in a vertical position in the soil, at the dead's head. The fir will be staying there during the moaning period. After a year, the fir is taken and carried to the dead's house. There, its wood will be burnt in the oven used to bake the bread for his requiem.

In some areas, like Hateg, Hunedoara or Gorj, these firs have imposing dimensions of 10-15 meters. This kind of fir is called *sulita* and 12 men participate at its transportation. During one year, this fir put in a vertical position dominates the cemetery, being visible from any place of the village. In our area of research the funeral fir is a widespread practice, but these trees have modest dimensions, between 1 and 3 meters. This area is dominated by hills and beech forests

therefore the firs do not reach the dimensions of those situated in the mountain regions.

A2. The fir/ the tree at the grave. As well as at the birth of a man, there is a custom to plant a fir at one's death. Usually, it is a fruit bearing tree/ a plum that is planted at the head of the dead, near the cross. This custom is widely spread both in rural and urban areas. Some old rural cemeteries look like some blossom orchards in spring. The tree often lasts longer than the cross, remaining the only sign of the grave. In the case of funeral monuments made of stone, the tree becomes present through the symbolic, decorative or stylized representation. We will exemplify this situation by some images from Cimitirul Central (The Central Cemetery) of Cluj-Napoca. This cemetery has an existence of over four hundred years (1585). An interesting aspect that characterizes the cemetery of urban area is that every year on the occasion of winter holidays (Christmas and New Year) the relatives of some of the dead place a Christmas tree on the grave. They adorn it with ribbons, tinsel and chocolate candies, making it look like the Christmas trees in people's houses. It is a way of communication, of keeping the connection between those who are dead and those who are alive.

A3. The dead's tree custom is wide spread in our area of research. It actually represents a collective prayer /requiem of all who died within a year, but not from the 1st January until the 31st December, but according to the religious calendar, from the last year's Easter until the Easter of the current year. This requiem takes place in the Great Week before Easter (The Great Thursday). Until this day, all the work related to the preparation for the Easter must be over. The gates of Heaven open and the dead' souls are coming home. The time and the space acquire special connotations. Since morning, in the yards situated behind the houses people light fires of materials that produce a lot of smoke. These fires accompanied by smoke, together with the noises produced by striking some metallic objects have the role of keeping away the bad spirits. The families who lost someone in the last year bring to the church several ritual objects, such as: a large cylindrical basket called ciur. In the past, it was a big screen for flour, nowadays some of them are made of plastic. In the basket one places: parastasul (a piece of bread that is only made on the occasion of a requiem),

several rituals pieces of bread, a bottle of wine, candles, a towel and some tree branches, usually plum. This wood is thrust in the parastas bread like a little tree and it is adorned with ribbons, candies, biscuits, apples and nuts. All the trees are adorned at the same time, inside the church. Then the baskets are put on a long table. The candles are lit near the trees and the religious service takes place. In Urca village, in 2010, all the people participating in the ceremony confessed their sins to the priest. During the requiem, the trees, the pieces of bread and the other objects are incensed and sprinkled with wine, while the names of all the dead are mentioned. People light candles and pray for the peace of their souls. At the end of the ceremony, the sweets and the fruits are given to the children. Some pieces of bread remain at church, and the rest of them are taken home. The tree is brought at home, where it will be kept at the beam or in the garret.