SEVERAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FOREIGNER IN ROMANIAN POPULAR EPICS NOTES FOR A FOLKLORIC IMAGOLOGY

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Abstract:
From the perspective of the anthropology of space, the problem of perception and representation of the alien remains a fertile subject of research, nevertheless inevitably interfering with imagology, in the sense assigned to the concept of image as any representation of a cultural reality through which the individual or the group translate the cultural, social, ideological space in which they are located. Identity does not justify an existence in itself, but only in relation to alterity. The imagological perspective of the foreigner in Romanian traditional culture proves rich in categories of representation dictated inevitably by reference to spatiality.

Keywords:
Alien, imagology, representation, culture, alterity

Born relatively recently, the domain of imagology claims older roots, which have revealed an interest in the analysis of the perception of the Other, in terms of ethnic, religious or ethical origin. In the last three decades of the last century, the analysis of the perception of the alien in host societies (traditional or contemporary) thus gained the much coveted scientific institutionalization if we look at Montesquieu's classical question from a historical perspective: *comment peut-on être Persan* ?

Paradoxically, however, when the researcher studies the local's perception of the foreigner, of the Other, as Jacques Derrida would say, he does not, actually, examine the foreigner, but, indirectly, the local receptor, who projects his own cultural pattern upon the foreigner, often creating an imaginary foreigner, endowed with generalising attributes, with emblematic qualities and stripped of those belonging to his own individuality. The result is a categorization, a cliché-isation deeply rooted in the mentality and

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memory of traditional communities, whose conservative tendency is revealed from this perspective as well.

From an anthropological point of view, in time, the perception of the alien suffers mutations of emphasis, depending on the chronological evolution and the interest in exotic, geographically distant societies. If, at first, this field's researchers were fascinated with the effect of their contact with the exotic, with the new geographic discoveries, populated with a humanity frozen in time "just like at the beginning" (a romantic image, dismantled later, after the intervention of the political and power factor in the anthropological equation), later the course of the scientific approach will restructure, by taking a 180-degree turn, towards their own cultures, to which anthropological grids are applied *à rebours*, in asystematic and systematized manner.

The years following the Second World War fully proved the viability of academic predictions, as anthropology, faithful to the new dictum (*exotic no more!*), returned home to re-activate a field of research insufficiently cultivated – European traditional societies. The problem of the foreigner proved an interesting research perspective, when related to this new reference system. However, in order to comment on the dimensions of the local-foreign ratio, one must start from the analysis of the group experiencing the intrusion. Therefore, the double reference of the standard group's mentality remains valid, in the sense of a variation in the indices that measure the perception of the alien, on a scale whose extreme values have been found in radical perspectives ever since the time of the ancient Greeks – the rule of Homer and the rule of Herodotus.

A number of theoretical circumscriptions seem necessary. Thus, in Christian Norberg-Schulz's perspective, we can establish hierarchies of the individual and, more importantly, the community existential space, which captures the man and his actions. According to hermeneutics, there are six levels which make up this space: the level of the hands, the body, the house, the rural/urban setting, the landscape and geography in the broad meaning of the term. In the sense that interests us, however, the level of the house structures the entire universe of the everyday world, as mundane receptacle (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Moreover, this perspective would be later complemented by the proposed ordering of sociologist Alfred Schütz, who put forward a ranking system based on the level of the world within actual

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reach, the world within potential reach, and the world within attainable reach (Schütz, 2003).

In both hermeneutical equations, man is found in a form of spatialisation of his own ordering, which is the house, where things are *in their place*, after a pattern whose originality is, in turn, limited to community custom. The phenomenon of grounding in the familiar occurs here, a reference according to which both the alien/the overseas, but also alienation are defined. All this is interesting because they are elements that give rise to spatialisation, as an act of identity-building. *Being locally from*, *being a man of the place* necessarily implies nativity, integration through the practice of the native group's custom, a sign of recognition of membership.

In a different sense, in the case of the foreigner perceived as outsider, as alien, we can speak of a certain tension that sets in between proximity and distance, equivalent to attraction and rejection, both related the referential system that is the core of the house as a home, as a form of personalization of the place, a form of civilizing imprinting, following the pulling out of the "wild". The notion of "home" is configured in these terms, no longer reduced to a strict form of housing, specific to the proto-civilizing stage, but extended to perceptual dimensions doubled emotionally, to a way of being.

The system thus obtained proves, consequently, the expression of a space that is re-configured but manages to express the individuality, taste and convenience of the owner, the household universe reflecting this entire complex in which things have their own place and the foreigner cannot find this very place – a ranking and justifying criterion for his presence in the im-personal space:

"Departure from the environments of coherence and clarity, which is the house, means being faced with a plurality of directions and horizons that determine behaviours and ideas different from our own, which become, in this way, surprising" (Mihali, 2001: 99), at the same time defining the ambiguous condition of the foreigner, baffling through its deviation from the norm of the centre.

From an anthropological perspective, the analytical approach of the relationship identity-otherness regards the (implicitly spatial) representations, followed by their effects on the collective imaginary, traceable in the literary image as well. One of the best known French imagologists (alongside Gilbert Durand and Jean-Marie Carré), Daniel

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Henry Pageaux also agreed that "any image results from the awareness" of"*a* self *in relation to the other, a* here *inrelation to* somewhere else".

Therefore, *"imagology leads the researcher to a problematic crossroads where literature meets history, sociology, anthropology, among other humanistic sciences and where the image tends to be particularly revealing for the functioning of an ideology (racism, exoticism, for example) and, moreover, for social imaginary"* (Pageux, 1986)

Related to the culture of the ancient Romanian society generally and to the forms of spatial representation, in particular, the problem of the notional play upon identity/alterity finds a fertile field of investigation, flawlessly exploited by Ernest Bernea in his essay "Space, time and causality in the Romanian people", which outlined the problem very eloquently:

> „*In the common mentality of the traditional village, the characteristics of the space are various and profound and are especially active. Moving from one place to another we will find individual features, which provide a wide range of values and meanings. Man wears their imprint throughout the course of his life", hence the axiom according to which 'Native and Foreigner are terms that raise the question of space*" (Bernea, 2005: 43).

The same problem as before arises here, that of the placement (location vs. displacement) of man in the setting, except now we are talking about reference to a space of the territory type, which justifies identities through (co) presence and revendication. One can thus recognise a reciprocity of socializing of the identity type – what Harold Proshansky called *place identity*, (Proshansky, Ittelson, Rivlin, 1970) and Abraham Moles defined in terms of possession/ownership (Moles, 1972) –, between the individual and the place he belongs to and, consequently, to whom it belongs. In this way, geography turns into territoriality, topology glides towards topography, finally becoming *topos*, through cultural imprinting.

As a metaphor for the social system, value and source of human acts, as Moles established (Moles, 1972: 26), the space reveals a diverse typology, plugged into the psychology and social relations specific to the community. According to the same anthropologist, they generate more categories, two of which prove extremely useful analytical tools in the anthropological research of the space: *home*, as a place for exercising ownership (private, par excellence), and *away*, as a similar space, but distinguished by the fact that it's in the possession of another (Moles, 1972:

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47) Belonging to the second category or even to neither of them, the foreigner automatically becomes suspicious for the social group of reference, the result being the famous association foreigner-stranger, abroad-strangeness, basically formulated in terms of territoriality. There are two directions that can generate the phenomenon: the centrifugal movement (from the original community towards another or towards the wider world), and the centripetal (from the world/ another community towards the targeted one), generating a typology which reveals the native and the foreigner, two types that, , *raise the question of space"* in the vision of Ernest Bernea as well. Referring to the community status of the latter, the Romanian ethnologist noted:

> „*Our people's opinion of the foreigner is extremely conclusive for the significance of location and the problem of space. The man who entered the village, coming from elsewhere, no matter how much would stay, still remains a stranger. His integration is almost impossible and if it is done, it is only formal*, because he preserves the characteristics of the place where he came from. *His integration and adaptation are a matter of nature, of substance, which he did not have in principle. Although he may be a good man, in our traditional villages the foreigner is not welcome"* (Bernea, 2005: 43).

Thus is activated an old complex of the remote associated with evil and non-value, which has been around starting with Herodotus' notations about the Persians, structured as the premise of one part of Tzvetan Todorov's research, in the volume *On Human Diversity*: Herodotus, in his *Investigation*, describes the Persians in the following way*:*

> *„Among the other peoples, they respect, after themselves, their close neighbors, then the latter's neighbors, and so on, according to the distance separating them; the most distant peoples are for them the least worthy of respect: as they consider themselves the most noble people from all points of view, the others' worth ranges for them according to the rule in question and the most distant nations also seem the most despicable"* (Todorov, 1999: 243)

Far from the regional radicalization the ancient scholar discussed, traditional Romanian mentality remains retractile in front of the foreigner for conservative reasons. In addition, foreign presence is difficult to accept because it's barely comprehensible, does not fall within the community's mentality patterns, the code of ethics the core of which is the village rejecting any outside element as impure. The cliché works especially in the

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case of one who abandons their household, their village, their own community, in favour of a journey prone to all kinds of evil: "Leaving one's place (the village) is associated with the suspicion that will be hovering over the one who wanders, who will be ranked as a foreigner, difficult to assimilate within the community precisely because of these suspicions:, *, If he has left his own village, he's not a good sort."* (Chivu, 2008: 168), is said almost invariably in the entire Romanian space. When questioned on the same problem, Ernest Bernea's peasants manifest the same reluctance, interrogatively, going as far as outward hostility:

> *„A foreigner is a foreigner and is not well seen, because he hasn't left for being a good sort. Why has he come? Couldn't he stay in his own village? If he's left his village, he's not a good man; and even if he is, people will still not be happy to see him, for, you see, no one knows him, or his kin, or his place. And you see, people are afraid!" or "A foreigner is under a cloud, as nobody knows what's inside him, what seed he has in himself. A foreign man remains a foreigner, no matter what he does"* (Bernea, 2005: 44).

The stigmatization of the *outsiders* by the *settled* who are organised in a community, as well as the commitment to the status of tolerated by the former represented a research subject for sociologist and historian Norbert Elias (in *The Civilizing Process*, a study that was apparently familiar to Ernest Bernea), as well as The Chicago School of Anthropology, their conclusions leading to the recognition of particular ways in which each culture constructs a socialization process and relates the dislocated individual to the group he joins.

The legal status of the foreigner formally integrated in the community through family alliance also proves sensitive. In this sense, Paul H. Stahl talks about several forms of resistance against intrusion, recorded in the old Romanian law codes, including the refusal to sell properties from the village lands to those who are not part of the community, preventing exogamy etc., because

> *„Being born in the village, belonging to one of its families, owning land to build a house in the village are visible signs of community membership. All peasants make a common effort to prevent foreigners from entering the community"* (Stahl, 2000: 149).

There are, however, several ways to enter the community, detailed by the ethnologist in the chapter "The native and the foreigner": becoming related to one of the group members (through marriage or blood

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brotherhood), in which case "they are integrated, an ancestor is invented, one that is related to the ancestors of the group they want to enter and which welcomes them"; defeating the locals' right of pre-emption, by purchasing a small estate etc. Each time, the imagological effect remains the same: the foreigner, , is humiliated, has no rights in the local assembly and is always reminded of his foreign origin" (Stahl, 2000: 205).

Interpersonal relationships established in the community also remain conservative, being only slightly affected by the presence of the foreigner devoid of identity through deterritorialization. The anthropological pattern of the relations instituted among the group members, recently determined by Susan Fiske, targets several levels of relationships, such as *communal sharing*, instituted in the extended family, *authority ranking*, aiming at the power ordering structures, *equality matching*, in relation with the elderly, and *market pricing*, in commercial exchanges (Fiske, 1993: 155-164). These relationship patterns are also visible in traditional communities, only here the foreigner can only access them exceptionally and, in any case, with numerous restrictions and prohibitions.

At another level of analysis, the presence of foreigners is thought to be generating disturbance in the very balance of community relationships with "the elements": "A foreigner is under a cloud, as nobody knows what's inside him, what seed he has in himself. (...) And if anything bad happens, people will suspect him; a plague or drought, or who knows what. But the man will not feel at ease, for he may be clean. It's better to stay in your plac." (Bernea, 2005: 44). Therefore, the one that is "displaced" feels the group's pressure/ oppression, not only attracting public condemnation, but also generating magic practices, such as, for instance, the ones against the plague, described by I. Aurel Candrea in *Folclor medical român comparat* (*Comparative Romanian Medical Folklore*, 1999). In any case, dislocation is considered a form of disorder, a break in "the order", in the village microcosm and the world.

Even more acute is the problem of foreign aggression when we're speaking about invasion of the national space, the ballad series of the invaders shaping, imagologically, an array of monstrously deformed or burlesque figures, according to the same mechanism of European collective thinking that imagined the savages of Columbus's new worlds having Cyclops eyes, multiple limbs and dog heads, using imagination to compensate for the distance to the unknown foreigner. In Romanian

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folkloric representations, the Arab is the type of the exotic foreigner, coming from an unknown "land", a fictional realm, disparaged through distance, after the famous rule of Herodotus. Originally located in a place of transit (the port of Brăila as an opening towards the enigmatic sea), the foreigner is looked upon as a curiosity of nature, being charged with a hybrid physiognomy, ichtio-human (Amzulescu, *Kira*). The character becomes objectionable when he falls in love with Kira, showing signs of an intention to uproot her out of the familiar space only to relocate her in a distant and, consequently, according to the mechanics of folkloric imagination, an ominous one. Following the girl's abduction, the foreigner's condition is that of an evil agent, which fits the logic of Michel de Certeau, according to whom the process of representation and reference to territoriality frequently go hand in hand.

Insinuated or self-established abusively in the domestic territory, like the most violent of the invaders, the Turks (less often the Tatars) are the oppressive foreigners that arouse horror, generating resistance and, in turn, giving birth to heroes such as Novac, Gruia, Balaban, Vâlcan, Marcu or Corbac. The end of the confrontations between national heroes and invaders is always the same – recover of lost territory and release of the enslaved (Amzulescu, *Gruia a lui Novac – Novac's Gruia*). Territory repossession is also done by "people of the land", who seem to have grown out of the substance of the Romanian topos, which provides them with an identity and legitimates their actions (Amzulescu, *Vâlcan*). This is a space which is overlapped by a profoundly national consciousness, a "localized geography, a chronography", as G. Vâlsan called it at the beginning of the last century (Vâlsa, 1992: 36) to which contemporary anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu adds the dimension of "national geography and *militans*, somewhat in the same manner in which Gusti spoke of a Romanian sociology and *militans* (Mihăilescu, 2003: 181).

However a particular form of relationship with the foreigner reveals an attitude which is completely different: the one endowed with the status of a guest (thus temporarily present in the group) receives the entire consideration and attention of the community, in keeping with ancient rules of hospitality. Relocation for a limited period to another space is ruled by family, trade, friendship or even coincidental ties, ascertaining the guest's rights in the host's house and obligations on the latter's part, imposed by custom. Moreover, setting in motion an anthropological type of thinking,

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Kant saw in this type of interpersonal relationship a way of reversing possession of territory, which no longer belongs to the local, during the stay, but the to the foreigner, being welcoming implies the foreigner's right to not be treated with hostility on arrival in a certain territory. .

Home can become, in other ballads, a trap for the traveller, if the host aims to deceive the foreigner, tempting him with immoral invitations. It is the case of epic scenarios built around the motif of the, , unfaithful wife", where the young man is introduced in the family space with hidden intentions and then becomes the cheated man's guest, after the woman's duplicity is proven (Amzulescu, *Ienăşel cel frumuşel - Pretty Ienasel*). What is more than obvious here is a double significance of space, present in the concept of *ethos* - habitation and morality, the premise of the study in the philosophy of culture undertaken by Andrei Pleşu in *Minima moralia*. *Elemente pentru etică a intervalului* (Minima moralia. Elements for an Ethic of the Interval). The contemporary philosopher of culture noticed the overlapping of values generated by this homonymy, associating the human space adjusted as residence with a set of ethical standards that make it possible for habitation:

> *„in Greek, the term ethos which formed the later term of "ethics" meant, among other things, housing. The spatial and architectural component implied in this term is essential, from our point of view, for a proper understanding of the moral law. (...) The ethic is the adjustment of the world with a view to inhabiting it, it is the establishment of a space in which the soul can feel as though it were at home. Moral conduct is not, in this context, anything but the higher form of that "habitation" (Wohnen), in which Heidegger saw man's earthly destiny"* (Pleşu, 1994: 16).

The microcosm of the house thus becomes a melting pot which mixes the tough substances of an ethic born at the level of community, any infringement being reprimanded by the abused or the entire group. Individualizing,

> *„in our epic and so in the ballad as well, the Romanian's moral character is illustrated as complex, flexible, consistent, with a strongly law-abiding nature – the Latin temptation, according to Mircea Vulcănescu; shiny, even pompous, but also indulged in thieving and machinations – the Byzantine temptation; pious, lascivious, capable of exaltation and delicacy – the Slavic temptation etc."* (Chivu, 2008: 202).

However it may be, the traditional ethic code works, unwritten, both in the case of sedentary location and also in that of the journey.

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A special situation is the one in which the foreigner is also seen en-route, but undertakes a dis-location that is required professionally, under a strict temporal and spatial pre-established regime, such as transhumance. In this case, as well, the shepherd is still regarded with reticence and his removal from the "foreign" grazing area is required, as if confirming one of Constantin Rădulescu-Motru's beliefs, according to whom *"in the depth of the Romanian soul lies the belief that the native man is one with the land"* (Rădulescu-Motru, 1984: 530).

The foreigner who upsets, in the native's opinion, the order of the community becomes the foreigner descended from another realm in fantastic ballads. In *Ardiu-crăişor*, from Al. I. Amzulescu's anthology, for example, the fairies that ravage the emperor's garden in the islet will trigger a genuine chaos in the terrestrial world through their presence and actions. The hero chosen to re-establish balance departs, in his turn, on a remedial journey, uprooting himself and becoming the foreigner in the other dimension. This form of dis-location is visible in the formula which designates him and marks his non-membership: "homeless Ardiu". It is only by returning to his native territory that the hero will be able to "settle down" and, implicitly, root a strong identity within the community by being recognized as the emperor's successor and by his marriage to the fairy, now entered into a terrestrial existential trajectory through motherhood and especially through territorial affiliation (the kingdom).

Marriage to "foreigners" is, however, very difficult to accept in traditional society. The fantastic ballad does not betray this pattern of mentality, refusing risky alliances. The group's strongly conservative system remains valid in mythical imagery, where the foreigner-stranger is firmly and often violently rejected (Amzulescu, *Ăi trei fraţi cu nouă zmei – Those three brothers with nine dragons*). In such compositions we can find reflexes of the relationships established between members of collectivist cultures, in which the allocentric, to use the same term as contemporary sociologist Harry Triandis (Triandis, Gelfand, 1990), acts with a view to maintaining the cohesion of the (familial, social, etc.) group. As a result of these mentality mechanisms being operational, the image of the foreigner is altered, often developing into as grotesque and terrifying.

From the perspective of the anthropology of space, the problem of perception and representation of the alien remains a fertile subject of

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reflection and research, nevertheless inevitably interfering with imagology, in the sense assigned to the concept of image by Daniel Pageaux, as

> *„a representation of a cultural reality through which the individual or the group who developed it (or is sharing or widening it) reveal or translate the cultural, social, ideological space in which they are located"* (Pageux, 1986: 200).

Because identity does not justify an existence in itself, but only in relation to alterity, in an interaction which orders all investigative endeavours they can be submitted to. Through such an interpretative filter, the imagological perspective of the foreigner in Romanian traditional culture proves rich, diverse and coalescent in categories of representation dictated inevitably by reference to spatiality.

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