

In-Between Societies: Romanian Urbanites and Their Cultural Demeanour (II)

Adina HULUBAŞ*

Keywords: *magic beliefs, Romanian urbanites, rural behaviour, traditional knowledge, urban culture*

(following from no. 2/2016)

Urban until Further Notice

Any rural-urban distinction starts necessarily from the fact that urban development was illusory (Cole 1981), since restricted, as already evidenced, to administrative actions, and the so-called towns are largely populated by urbanites. In terms of dichotomies, the rural-urban dichotomy can be translated into magic beliefs versus rational reasoning, in the importance of the social network versus support of specialized contacts and in a confident attitude versus a more cautious and even suspicious reaction to the environment. For example, a rural type of pragmatism makes urbanites perform a ritual bathing of the child that would assure his health, cleanness and wealth by magic contact to ritual objects, while urban rationalism is traced in finding wealthy Godparents and in giving a glamorous party at the restaurant on the occasion of the baptism.

Traditional education may determine an intermingled thinking which is modern and inveterate at the same time. The “continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs” (Eisenstadt 2000: 2) is visible at subjects with higher professional trainings. Emilia, a retired midwife, age 69, interweaves scientific explanations with magic reasoning throughout the entire conversation. She believes that birthmarks are caused by thefts the pregnant woman committed, but she rejects superstitions about twin pregnancies, since these are hereditary. Scientific training does not always succeed in clearing out the involvement of magic causes. She declared that her son had his hand burnt when he was two years old because she had disobeyed the taboo of lighting a fire, while being confined after birth.

The impurity of the blood magically bans the women in partition to stay near the hearth in villages, otherwise the child will suffer from burns or a skin disease called “small fires” (*focușoare*). In Latin (goddess Vesta) and Greek (goddess Hestia) mythology, the hearth represents the space where the home deity resides. It was therefore forbidden to offend her by blood profanation and even today people still

* “A. Philippide” Institute of Romanian Philology, Iasi, Romania.

act cautiously around fire sources. When I mentioned to my urbanite subject that the cooker is different from a traditional hearth, she immediately responded that it is still a burning fire. Rural cultural patterns are transplanted into the urban environment because they induce a psychological comfort by maintaining familiar topography.

Moreover, superstitions adapt themselves to economical changes and thus the cooker embodies the archetypal features of fire. The “multiple and divergent modernities” (Eisenstadt 2003: 509) co-exist in the urban Romanian society because they are complementary: where science can no longer provide answers, traditional culture speaks up. Its voice is not silenced by the fact that customs may be replaced by urban “public opinions” and “positive law” (Park 1979: 164), mainly because the socio-economical development of postsocialist countries favours cultural persistency, as empirical data will show in the following.

Rites of passage are never ignored by the first generation of town inhabitants, or by their children. Wedding, birth and funeral ceremonies receive greater importance mainly because of their consequences on life. Family events enforce social bonding by a ritually imposed behaviour. Ceremonial acts are, therefore, the last to fade when confronted to a pragmatic type of society. The common mind functions as a cultural catalyser: “memory helps in the construction of collective identities and boundaries” (Misztal 2010: 28) and it is characterized by a “normative transmission” (Shils 1981: 24).

Forty years ago in Serbia, just as today in Romania, most of the city dwellers had recently arrived from villages. In Belgrad,

contemporary and affluent couples speed to their wedding festivities in Fiats bedecked with plastic flowers and towels (the towels are tied on the hood just under the windshield) in the same manner that horse-drawn fiacres are decorated for village weddings (Simić 1973:71).

Today, in Romania, cars that follow the bride and the groom for the religious procession honk repeatedly and often irritate people in the street. Nevertheless, the cultural memory of a magic behaviour proves itself surprisingly active. Almost a century ago, peasants attending a traditional wedding fired their guns in the air or loudly snapped whips in order to scare maleficent entities that would have attended the ceremony. All transitional phases are defined by magical vulnerability in world-wide superstitions. In Romania, the contemporary way to ward off evil spirits makes use of automobiles.

Urbanites are unlikely to break the traditional set of rules, since customs can ensure inner peace by the conviction that things will turn out well (Author 2015). All urban subjects I interviewed respected pregnancy taboos and went through religious procession in order to redeem the so-called sin of giving birth. On the other hand, the second generation of city inhabitants reacts under cultural pressure exerted by parents; they no longer acknowledge the importance of rituals and even disobey them. Magdalina declared that she blackmailed her son to respect the “Hen” custom (*Găina*) at his wedding, with the threat not to attend the event otherwise. Also, when her daughter delivered her child, the urbanite in question went personally to the

hospital and offered the midwife a traditional gift consisting of a towel and soap¹, although it is the confined woman who has to redeem her sins by this gesture. Even more so, my subject took the situation into her hands again, when her daughter-in-law had her child. Another female subject, Elena, age 50, specified that both her children's weddings had to be organized by all means traditionally.

Traditional culture still manages to create a certain expectation of unwanted events, as in the case of second generation urban informant Cerasela, age 36, who is a maternity resident doctor. When she gave birth to her child, she did not obey the custom to offer the midwife soap and a towel, and limited her gratitude to offering money. Soon, the infant developed pyoderma and her entire family blamed her infringement. In this case, although the original meaning of the custom is lost, the ritual obligation persists. It is important to notice how the traditional code remains active in reflecting life events. Infringements followed by fear are a socio-cultural symptom that reminds of the beginning of acculturation.

Pressure is also put on institutions when it comes to passage rites. The medical staff of the Emergency Hospital in Iași city was obliged to include in their life saving kit matches and a candle to be lit when death of a patient is imminent. The measure was taken because of the repeated questions asked by relatives of defunct whether or not death occurred “with a light” (*cu lumânare*). In traditional mentality, the After World is covered in darkness and the departed has to receive a candle as part of the alms in order to see his/ her way (Ciubotaru 1999: 47). Whenever death occurs and no candle is burning close-by, the family has to perform ritual acts that atone for this great ontological tragedy: they pay specific religious services for a long time, offer alms and use specific candles during the Easter procession.

Constraint is no longer necessary, since the outlook on life applies folk patterns. Although the urbanite “is no longer supported by the collective wisdom of the peasant community” (Park 1979: 165), he chooses to obey cultural and social rules (such as staying indoors before the religious rituals), because traditional memory is active. Escaping constraints, abandoning or modifying ritual prescriptions become an option only for the second or third generation of urban inhabitants, who are not affected by anxious perceptions of the city. For urbanites, clinging to traditional beliefs is an antidote to the chaotic life in a town, since superstitions induce the illusion of order:

we create, in short, our own cover stories. These then serve as a kind of lens through which we filter our experience of the world. They may produce a distorted sense of reality, but that distortion can serve a vital function, often by making the world appear to be a rational, predictable place we can control (Hallinan 2014: 2).

Romania still experiences the first phase of urbanization, out of the four established ones². This socio-economic context characterizes most of the countries

¹ The custom is called “the midwife’s sleeves” (*mânecele moașei*) and is active in Russia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bulgaria (too ee Hulubaș 2012: 103–118).

² Urbanization, suburbanization, counterurbanization and reurbanization are generally considered to be the four phases of the urban population dynamics.

from the ex-Soviet bloc and implies active memories on traditions and folk beliefs. In Ukraine, for example, magic causes of events are commonly invoked, even by mass media:

Even among the most educated and technically-minded modern Ukrainian urbanites, ancient beliefs in witches, witchcraft, house demons, dead souls, sorceresses, and their influence on human life is incredibly strong (Golovakha-Hicks 2008: 38).

Bulgaria is also confronted with this socio-cultural phenomenon. The above-invoked custom concerning symbolic redemption by a gift for the traditional birth attendant (consisting of a soap and towel that would cleanse the birth blood), acquired an institutional form: a national holiday called “Day of Natal Assistance and Motherhood”. The old ritual is now performed both at home, for grandmothers that actually ceased delivering babies more than half a century ago, and in hospitals. On the 21st of January,

Bulgarian women visit their grandmothers to ceremonially wash their hands and to present them with a fluffy new towel. The same ritual is enacted in the maternity wards of hospitals, where nurses are given a towel as an acknowledgement of their role in taking care of the mothers and their newborn (Stavreva and Quek 2008: 67).

Contexts and Reasons for Rural Behaviour

Urbanites react with a stir when asked about traditional beliefs and enjoy remembering things their grandparents and mothers told them. They are members of *Gemeinschaft* or “fixed-membership group”, since they “remain culturally conservative in the face of external pressures to change” (Plotnicov 1962, 100). Hence, there is no danger of manipulating the subject to admit unrealistic beliefs when suggesting traditional explanations in the interview. Viorica, age 56, mentioned that many of the common childbirth customs were brought to her knowledge only after she moved into the city. Work colleagues coming from different rural areas let her know about certain superstitions and rituals, but she kept her traditional awareness of the fact that “it is not how it was done” in her native hamlet. Therefore, patriarchal culture does not offer the premises of falsifying spiritual data for a scientific thesis. Peasants and urbanites immediately reject alien elements, being more exposed to material changes (such as improving the comfort of house living), than to acculturation.

The interlocutor has to insist tactfully and to rephrase his questions in order to obtain an exact image of the cultural retention. Villagers would respond by saying “it is right to do so” whenever they no longer possess magic explanations for beliefs, while urbanites tend to elude answers in two ways. Firstly, they invoke religious ideas and Christian deities. For example, when asked why the pregnant woman should not tell anyone about the time she is to give birth to her child, Daniela, age 28 answered that only God knows the exact moment. After mentioning the belief that the more people know about the labour, the more the pregnant woman will suffer, the informant confirmed knowing it. The superstition is common in Romania, but also in Polesia, a region located in South-East Europe (Kabakova 2000: 56).

Another similar situation refers to the unbaptised infant, who is very susceptible to evil intentions in cultures all around the world. The interdiction to leave the child alone in the room is found in Turkey (Bartoli 1998: 226) and also in villages from Moldova, in the eastern part of Romania. When the mother has work to do, she uses apotropaic objects to be replaced by. Some urban subjects mentioned Orthodox icons and crosses put in the cradle of the baby, while further questions revealed that fire tongs were also used to ward off maleficent entities. Villagers use them next to a broom and a knife, and describe these objects put by the unchristian baby as companions that would fight against all evil attacks. Elena B., age 61, explained the magic power of domestic items as anthropomorphised weapons: the broom “sweeps off evil, the fire tongs bash it”.

Apart from the religious conventional answers, the interview should go beyond common pragmatic responses. The traditional solution for a continuously sick child, who sometimes has already dead siblings, is not a visit to the doctor, as urbanites tend to say on a first impulse. All questioned informants were familiar with the magic custom of “selling” a sick baby on the window of the house to a woman with many healthy children, in order to re-write the fate and escape death. Actually, Magdalina symbolically “bought” six urban children³.

The natural context to activate traditional data is mainly ceremonial (as baptism or the moment when the child turns one and has his hair cut by his Godmother), but it also conveys family moments, when traditional knowledge is passed from one generation to another (for example, when the daughter or the daughter-in-law is pregnant, the urbanite mother draws her attention on baneful gestures or sights).

Whenever ex-peasants find themselves in the company of their friends and relatives, work colleagues or neighbours with rural origins, Goffman’s distinction between the expression they give and the expression they give off (1959: 2) becomes inoperable.

Urbanites discern clearly the justified contexts for rural behaviours. The interview is an artificial context and it does not pay for the infringement of the urban appearance. On the other hand, “the rites of passage” (Van Gennep 2013) such as childbirths, weddings and funerals, are ontologically more important than urban acting. Even the most self-conscious urbanite I talked with, Stela admitted that she would warn uninitiated young urban mothers on what should be done during infant’s ritual bath performed after baptism (*scăldătoare*), despite any possible negative reaction. Sorina, age 42, declared the same about the custom to bathe the new Christian with magic ingredients, such as milk, sugar, bread and many more:

‘I know it has to be put inside the bath and she [the infant’s mother] has forgotten to. If it has to be done, what?! I tell her! If I know it has to be said, why not

³ The house symbolizes the womb the child exits again, this time to a longer and better life. The woman who receives the baby outside the window pays a few coins to his mother and brings back the child on the door. The ritual is performed three times, after which the baby remains with his biological mother, but he would call the woman who bought him “mother”, too.

tell her? I know this has to be put in the bathing water, if you agree, put it, if not, don't. Yes. Otherwise, she can say afterwards: "But I didn't know!". I had to say it'.

The sudden rural intervention into an urban setting of events may appear rude and unexplainable since previously, the urbanite dissimulated well his traditional knowledge. It is the authority of the elders that imposed on him the necessity to pass on cultural data. Peasant societies (Redfield 1940: 735) are defined by such fixed laws that create cohesion and also coercions for their members. Passage rites gather the most frequent contexts of socially enforced gestures.

Nevertheless, an urbanite with thorough knowledge would "refuse to spin out meanings, but simply say that they perform rituals in certain ways because that is the tradition", since ritual "is about doing more than saying something" (Seligman et al. 2008: 4). During the interviews, a certain pressure of the researcher determines informants to ask themselves rhetorically why ritual gestures are mandatory and what they might mean. This effect of the "observer's paradox" (Labov 1973) made Viorica demand herself several times on the reasons of the actions she scrupulously repeated in her urban life. Elena B. resorted to fanciful interpretations immediately, such as assessing that the egg battered into the bathing water of the newly baptised child would bring about fertility.

Two contexts for traditional reactions have been therefore established: familiar circumstances and ceremonial events. As for the explanations, they may be related to three different situations. Firstly, every time scientific causes cannot be found, magic knowledge steps in to provide answers. All three stages of the passage rites identified by Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 offer examples of superstitions and practices that defy the urban context. The rites of separation, transitional rites and the incorporation ones (Van Gennep 2013: 11) present in the childbirth customs performed in Romanian towns abound in rural gestures and convictions.

Secondly, superstitions survive as an intention to ward off evil. Next to the red thread tied at baby's wrist, urbanites use brooms, knives and Orthodox icons or crosses to protect the baby. The first are obviously older than Christian cult objects. The broom is supposed to "sweep out the evil" by itself, as Elena B. declared, whereas the knife also animates itself and stabs maleficent entities that come to torment or to steal the unchristian baby.

The last reason for the persistency of traditional knowledge in Romanian towns (Author 2014) defines the main purposes of magic: dominating fate and deciding favourable outcomes. The ritual bath after baptism contains several ingredients with magic powers. Milk is supposed to provide a white beautiful skin to the baby, while sugar makes him "sweet", which means that he will grow up to be pleasant and popular. Furthermore, the one year old baby has to choose a work instrument from a selection made by his parents and Godparents and presented to him in a ceremonial context. The object he picks up apparently foretells his future occupation.

The above presented findings show how traditional information mingles with everyday urban behaviour. What is perfectly mimicked as adaptation to town living is, in the case of Romanian urbanites, a latent yet vigilant cultural memory that dissolves the antinomy between the "preservation of one's indigenuous roots and adherence to the modern project" (Sachsenmaier 2002: 58). The socio-cultural palimpsest can be used to diagnose the level of urban adaptation and acculturation based on the visibility of previous traditional education.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the existent literature by adding a folkloric dimension to urban sociology. Much of the discussion has focussed on the idea that traditional knowledge influences social behaviour even after subjects shifted from rural settlements to urban living. I argued that folk beliefs and gestures are spontaneous and reveal a magic outlook on life. Three reasons support this anachronism: the scientific impossibility to explain everything, the fear of unseen evil forces and the human aspiration to positively influence the future. A broader aim of this article has been to use qualitative sociology to reveal the dynamics of everyday behaviour for post-socialist urbanites and to see how ingrained cultural identity influences their actions. The article suggests that urban cultural studies should make use of ethnographic data to track behavioural patterns of gradual adaptation.

References

- Abraham 1991: Dorel Abraham, *Introducere în sociologia urbană* [An Introduction to Urban Sociology]. Bucharest: Editura Științifică.
- Agergaard 2010: Jytte Agergaard, Niels Fold, and Katherine V. Gough, (eds), *Rural – Urban Dynamics. Livelihood, mobility and markets in African and Asian frontiers*. London: Routledge.
- Andresco, Bacou 1986: Ioana Andresco, Mihaela Bacou. *Mourir à l'ombre des Carpathes* [Dying in the Shade of the Carpathians], Paris: Payot.
- Arfire 2011: Ramona Arfire. *The Moral Regulation of the Second Europe: Transition, Europeanization and the Romanians*. "Critical Sociology" 37(6): 853–870.
- Assman 1995: Jan Assman, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*. "New German Critique" 65: 125–133.
- Balandier 1985: Georges Balandier, *Le Détour. Pouvoir et modernité* [The Detour. Power and Modernity]. Paris: Fayard.
- Balzer 1980: Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *Route to eternity. Cultural persistence and change in Siberian Khanty burial ritual*. "Arctic Anthropology" 17(1): 77–89.
- Balzer 1981: Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *Rituals of gender identity: markers of Siberian Khanty ethnicity, status, and belief*. "American Anthropologist" 83(1): 850–867.
- Balzer 1986: Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *Flights of the sacred: symbolism and theory in Siberian shamanism*. "American Anthropologist" 98(2): 305–318.
- Bartoli 2007: Lise Bartoli, *Venir au monde. Les rites de l'enfantement sur les cinq continents*. Paris: Édition Payot & Rivages.
- Benedict 2002: Benedict Ruth, *Cultura și comportamentul la români* [Culture and Behaviour of Romanians]. Norcross: Criterion Publishing.
- Berdahl 1999: Daphne Berdahl, "'(N)Ostalgie' for the present: Memory, longing, and East German things". "Ethnos". 64(2): 192–211.
- Buch 2013: Tanja Buch, Silke Hamann, Annekatrin Niebuhr, and Anja Rossen, *What Makes Cities Attractive? The Determinants of Urban Labour Migration in Germany*. "Urban Studies" 51(9): 1960–1978.
- Ciobotaru 1999: Ion H. Ciobotaru, *Marea trecere. Repere etnologice în ceremonialul funebru din Moldova* [The Great Passage. Ethnologic Marks in Death Ceremonies from Moldova]. Bucharest: Editura "Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională".

- Ciubotaru 2014: Ion H. Ciubotaru, *Obiceiurile funebre din Moldova în context național* [Funerary Customs from Moldova in the National Context]. Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.
- Cole 1981: John W. Cole, *Problems of Socialism in Eastern Europe*. “Dialectical Anthropology” 9(2): 233–256.
- Douglas 2001: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Durkheim 1995: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of religious Life*. New York: Free Press.
- Eglitis 2010: Daina Eglitis, *Class, Culture, and Consumptions: Representations of Stratification in Post-communist Latvia*. “Cultural Sociology”. 5(3): 423–446.
- Eisenstadt 2000: Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple modernities*. “Daedalus” 129(1): 1–29.
- Eisenstadt 2003: Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations & Multiple Modernities II*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill.
- Finch 2007: Janet Finch, Displaying families. *Sociology* 41(1): 65–81.
- Fribourg 1987: Jeanine Fribourg, “*Dynamique des modèles socio-culturels urbains*” [The Dynamic of the Urban Socio-Cultural Models], in *Chemins de la ville. Enquêtes ethnologiques* [City Roads. Ethnological Investigations] edited by J. Gutwirth, C. Pétonnet, 155–169. Paris: Éditions du CTHS.
- Foster 1953: George M. Foster, *What is Folk Culture?* “American Anthropologist” 55(2): 159–173.
- Galasińska 2006: Aleksandra Galasińska, *Border ethnography and post-communist discourses of nationality in Poland*. “Discourse & Society” 17(5): 609–626.
- Geertz 1957: Clifford Geertz, *Ritual and Social Change*. “American Anthropologist” 59(1): 32–54.
- Glick-Schiller 2003: Nina Glick-Schiller, *The Centrality of ethnography in the study of transnational migration: seeing the Wetland instead of the Swamp*, in *American Arrivals: anthropology engages the new immigration*, edited by N. Foner: 99–128. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Goffman 1959: Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Golopenția 2001: Sanda Golopenția, *Intermemoria. Studii de pragmatică și antropologie* [Inter-memory. Studies of Pragmatics and Anthropology]. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia.
- Golovakha-Hicks 2008: Inna Golovakha-Hicks, *The Life of Traditional Demonological Legends in Contemporary Urban Ukrainian Communities*. “Folklore” 40: 37–44.
- Halbwachs 1992: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hallinan 2014: Joseph T. Hallinan, *Kidding Ourselves: the Hidden Power of Self-Deception*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Hann 2003: Chris Hann, *Introduction: Decollectivisation and the moral economy*, in *The postsocialist agrarian question: Property relations and rural condition*, edited by C. Hann: 1–46. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Hannerz 1969: Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Holy 1996: Ladislav Holy, *The little and the great Czech nation. National identity and the post-communist social transformation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Horvat, Štiks 2012: Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks, *Welcome to the Desert of Transition!: Post-socialism, the European Union and a New Left*. “Balkans Monthly Review” 63(10): 38–48.

- Hulubaş 2012: Adina Hulubaş, *Obiceiuri de naştere din Moldova. Tipologie şi corpus de texte* [Childbirth Customs from Moldova. A Typology and Texts Corpus], Iaşi, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Press.
- Humphrey 1991: Caroline Humphrey, *Icebergs’ barter and the mafia in provincial Russia*. “Anthropology Today” 7(2): 8–13.
- Humphrey 1995: Caroline Humphrey, *Creating a culture of disillusionment: consumption in Moscow in 1993, a chronicle of changing times*. In *Worlds Apart. Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, edited by D. Millar, 43–68. London: Routledge.
- Humphrey 2002: Caroline Humphrey, *Does the Category ‘Postsocialist’ Still Make Sense? In Postsocialism: Ideal, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia* edited by C. Hann, 12–15. London: Routledge.
- Ioan, Mihali 2009: Augustin Ioan and Ciprian Mihali, *Dublu tratat de urbanologie* [Double Treatise of Urbanology]. Cluj: Editura Idea Design & Print.
- Istrate 2008: Marinela Istrate, *Relațiile urban-rural în Moldova în perioada contemporană* [Urban-Rural Relations in Contemporary Moldova]. Iaşi: Editura Universităţii “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.
- Jung 1990: Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton University Press.
- Kabakova 2000: Galina Kabakova, *Anthropologie du corps féminin dans le monde slave* [Anthropology of The Feminine Body in the Slav World]. Paris: L’Harmattan.
- Karnoouh 1994: Claude Karnoouh, *Românii, tipologie şi mentalități* [The Romanians, a typology and mentalities]. Bucharest: Humanitas.
- Kideckel 2010: David Kideckel, *România postsocialistă. Munca, trupul şi cultura clasei muncitoare* [Getting by in Post-socialist Romania. Labor, the Body, and Working-Class Culture]. Iaşi: Polirom.
- Kligman 1988: Gail Klingman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania*. University of California Press.
- Labov 1973: William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lankauskas 2015: Gediminas Lankauskas, *The Land of the Weddings and rain. Nation and Modernity in Post-Socialist Lithuania*. University of Toronto Press.
- Levitt, Glick-Schiller 2004: Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller, *Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society*. “International Migration Review” 38: 595–629.
- McCauley, Lawson 2002: Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind. Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Misztal 2010: Barbara A. Misztal, *Collective Memory in a Global Age. Learning How and What to Remember*, “Current Sociology” 58(1): 24–44.
- Mungiu-Pippidi 2005: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *“Reinventing the peasants: local state capture in post-communist Europe*, in *Between East and West. Studies in Anthropology and Social History*, edited by Ş. Dorondel and S. Şerban, 308-326. Bucharest: Editura Institutului Cultural Român.
- Nicolescu 2011: Răzvan Nicolescu, *Material Culture as Ethnography. Value, Work and Modernity in Rural Romania*. “Studia UBB Sociologia” LVI (2): 123–135.
- Park 1967: Robert Ezra Park, *The City: Suggestion for the investigation of human behaviour in the urban environment*. In *The City*, edited by R.E. Park, E. W. Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie. The University of Chicago Press.

- Park 1979: Robert Ezra Park, *La ville comme laboratoire social* [The City as A Social Laboratory], in *L'école de Chicago* [The Chicago School], edited by Y. Grafmeyer, and I. Joseph. Paris: 167–183. Éditions de Champ Urbain.
- Pascaru 2012: Mihai Pascaru, *Câteva repere demografice ale ruralului românesc*, in *Inerție și schimbare. Dimensiuni sociale ale tranziției în România* [Inertia and Change. Social Dimension of Transition in Romania], edited by T. Rotariu and V. Voineagu: 223–250. Iași: Polirom.
- Pickles 2010: John Pickles, *The spirit of Post-socialism: Common Spaces and the Production of Diversity*. “European Urban and regional Studies”. 17(2): 127–140.
- Pine 2002: Frances Pine, *Retreat to the household? Gendered domains in postsocialist Poland*, in *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*, edited by C. Hann: 95–113. London: Routledge.
- Plotnicov 1962: Leonard Plotnicov, *Fixed Membership Groups: the Locus of Culture Process*. “American Anthropologist” 64(1): 97–103.
- Redfield 1940: Robert Redfield, *The Folk Society and Culture*. “American Journal of Sociology” 45(5): 731–742.
- Redfield, Singer 1969: Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, *The Cultural Role of Cities*, in *Classic essays on the culture of cities*, edited by R. Sennett: 206–233. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Ries 1997: Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Roncayolo 2002: Marcel Roncayolo, *Lectures de villes. Formes et temps* [Reading Cities. Forms and Times]. Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses.
- Sant Cassia, Bada 1992: Paul Sant Cassia and Constantina Bada, *The making of the Modern Greek Family: Marriage and Education in Nineteenth Century Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sachsenmaier 2002: Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Multiple Modernities – the Concept and Its Potential*, in *Reflections on multiple modernities: European, Chinese and Other Interpretations*, edited by D. Sachsenmaier, J. Riedel and S.N. Eisenstadt: 42–67. Leiden: Brill.
- Seligman et alii 2008: Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its consequences: an essay on the limits of sincerity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shils 1981: Edward Shils, *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simić 1973: Andrei Simić, *The Peasant Urbanites. A Study of Rural-Urban Mobility in Serbia*. New York: Seminar Press.
- Sjoberg 1955: Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City*. “The American Journal of Sociology” LX: 438–445.
- Stavreva, Quek 2008: Kirilka Stavreva and Lynette Quek, *Cultures of the World: Bulgaria*. Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish.
- Swindler 1986: Ann Swindler, *Culture in action: symbols and strategies*. “American Sociological Review” 51(2): 273–286.
- Ștefănescu 2010: Florica Ștefănescu, *Disparități economice și demografice între ruralul și urbanul românesc* [Demographic and economic disparities between the Romanian rural and urban zones], in *Relația rural-urban: ipostaze ale tradiției și urbanizării* [The Rural-Urban Relation: Hypostases of Tradition and Modernization], edited by I.M. Balog, R. Grăf, and I. Lumperdean: 85–104. Cluj: Presa universitară clujeană.
- Van Gennep 2013: Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge.
- Verdery 1996: Katherine Verdery, *Nationalism, postsocialism, and space in Eastern Europe*. “Social Research” 63 (1): 77–95.

- Verdery 2002: Katherine Verdery, *Whither Postsocialism?*, in *Postsocialism: Ideal, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*, edited by C. Hann: 238–257. London: Routledge.
- Verdery 2005: Katherine Verdery, “*Possessive Identities*” in *Post-Socialist Transylvania*, in *Between East and West. Studies in Anthropology and Social History*, edited by Ș. Dorondel and S. Șerban: 341–366. Bucharest: Editura Institutului Cultural Român.
- Voiculescu 2008: Cerasela Voiculescu, *Disappearing peasants? On land, rent, and revenue in post-1989 Romania*. “*Focaal—European Journal of Anthropology*” 52: 77–91.
- Wanner 1998: Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post/Soviet Ukraine*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Weber 1921: Max Weber, *The City*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Wheatley 1971: Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters. A Preliminary Inquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Wirth 1938: Louis Wirth, *Urbanism as a Way of Life*. “*The American Journal of Sociology*” 44(1): 1–24.
- Young 1993: James Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust, Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Young, Kaczmarek 2008: Craig Young and Sylvia Kaczmarek, *The Socialist Past and Postsocialist Urban Identity in Central and Eastern Europe. The Case of Łódź*. “*European Urban and regional Studies*” 15(1): 53–70.

Abstract

This article considers the role of traditional knowledge in the everyday life of Romanian urbanites by focusing on rural reactions and convictions displayed in urban settlements. The method is based on a comparative approach between the native places of subjects and their own actions and beliefs. Post-socialism did not eliminate superstitious reasoning, which continues to exist and even to assimilate modern devices to magic purposes. The article proposes that ethnographic evidence should be made use of in urban cultural studies of South-Eastern countries. The socio-cultural perspective contributes to a better understanding of the modernization dynamics.