THE PHENOMENA OF LENT IN ROMANIA NOWADAYS

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Abstract: This article is based on a research about the Lent in our society to demonstrate the capacity of people to understand the spiritual meaning of Easter today. For my study, I used meta-analytical method and questionnaire to understand better the phenomena of Lent. It represents a necessity of people to go through a certain "magical time". In the period before Lent, people are trying to adapt to the new rituals. The Lent is in fact the most important threshold for Christians. The ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep considered that people are transforming themselves from what they were to what they will be through participating to Easter threshold.

The rites of passage in the case of Lent has a sacred signification where people are proving its value. Lent is consisting in forty days in which people have restriction to food from animals, to alcoholic drink and other things that will give pleasure. Lent is more about humbleness. Romanians are trying to participate in Lent, but, not many of them acquire their full attention and respect to it. Lent started to become more a symbolic gesture where people are aware of it, but are not effectively participate in it.

Keywords: anthropology, Lent, Easter, rituals, liminality

1. Introduction

Christians are entering in liminality for Easter from the moment when the Lent is starting. With forty days before Easter, all Romanian people are aware of the event, but not many of them are participating in it. Holy Friday is considering by Christians as a black day because it is the day when Jesus Chris has died. And after three days, Jesus returns from death. Through that, he demonstrates that he is the son of God. In this period, Romanian Christians are entered in the liminal state and have a sacred symbolism: they are renouncing to food from meat and are participating in the churches' rituals. In this space, they are becoming more aware of the influences of religion and are more considered as a part of the Romanian nation than before. The wish of every Romanian is to become a better person, and in order to achieve that, they have to manage to go through new activities such: going more often to churches, renounce to food which its origin is from animals, to behave in a more spiritual way. The people who are participating in that rituals are getting closer to God through praying.

„Posturele înseamnă mare lucru înaintea lui Dumnezeu. Cine postește mare dar își câștigă și sunt de mare ajutor. Cu postul, cu rugăciunele și cu faptele cele bune să caăptă importanța cerului. Posturele sunt așezate de Domnul Hristos și de Sfinții Apostolic a să le postim. Postul cel mare să postește pentru Domnul Hristos, că el a dat legea. Postul lungește zilele omului. Cine postește saptamana cea dintai a postului, de luni pana joi, fara ca sa manance nimic, știe când are să moară cu trei zile înainte". (Niculita-Voronca:1998)

From this, we can see the wish of the Romanian Christian to take part in the church rituals. Another fact is that this liminal state in which he is caught, it makes him to act in another type of behavior, I can say a more spiritual one. In the liminality, he may think that he will remain changed even after the threshold state had gone. Every Romanian, in the moment when the celebration is finished, he will return to the state in which he was in the first time. Thus, I can say that the liminal state of Easter doesn't change the Christian forever. It changes him for a sort amount of time. However, this liminal state is more beneficial for the time in which people are participating in rituals because it prepares them in a spiritual and moral way to holy the day of Sunday in which the Rises of Jesus Christ is happening.

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Easter celebration is more than a simple day of Sunday. Romanians are preparing their entrances in the big day through different religious and social rituals. The women are preparing traditional foods which they are taught since they were young in order to celebrate the Easter. Thus, Romanians are facing a more profane way in the liminal state; they prefer to center their attention on the fact that will be free days, so they choose to celebrate Easter far away from their jobs and their routine. Here, the tradition is bond with the modernity of Romania today where it become to borrow from another culture different traditions. Romania has become a center of battle between tradition and modernity, and between the Romanian roots with traditional customs and the ones who are just borrowed from another culture and in which old people cannot recognize them. The path the Christians are going through starts from the moment when the rituals are becoming a part of the society. A very important ritual for Easter is the Lent in which people are renouncing to animal food, to a bad behavior and are starting to go more often to church. Thus, liminality is inducing people to enter in a threshold state. Here, people learn about their roots, their traditions and how to conserve them and to pass to the next generations. This means that liminality is preparing the Christians to take a look over their traditions and what it meant for their ancestors.

Easter is a traditional celebration in Romania and it is bound to the Romanian village. If we look before the day of Jesus's Revive, we can observe a series of rules that our religion is asking us to accept them. So, Easter is a celebration with a mobile day, it come every year on the same day. Irina Nicolau said in her book that: Dacă faci o socoteală, Paștele creștinului ortodox practicant durează peste o sută de zile, mult mai mult decât un sfert din durata unui an. (…) Dar cât de lung este cel mai mult post al anului? Unii îl compară cu o pădure mare și fără capăt, unde se rătăcesc cei care nu se pocăiesc. (…) Paștele se socotește. Cade în prima duminică cu lună plină care urmează echinochiuțului de primăvară. Starea de așteptare pornește astfel încă din luna martie. Există o vorbă în popor cu privire la Paști și anume că „nu lipsește Martie din post" (Nicolau, 1998).

Even if the Easter is a celebration with a mobile day, the Lent will always be in March; as in Irina Nicolau's book said about the Lent and March that: "March doesn't miss Lent". In the last three years, Easter was celebrated in April, in the center of spring. The celebration of Easter has a major influence over all Romania. In the country, there are many rituals and traditions, every Romanian region has different types of customs. However, Easter is celebrated with all his rituals and it is considered one of the most important celebrations in Romania in all the time. Although Easter is considered important, in the cities, its rituals are not as spiritual as the Bible said. The rituals are preserve more in the villages where the "magical" space is still in.

2. Lent in the Romanian cities

Lent is the beginning of Easter manifestation in the society. Holding the feast means that you are taking part of a magical time where nothing that was real in the community doesn't exist anymore. In this time, the reality is meeting with the imaginary or in our cases, with the religion. Our reality is different from a community to other, but they have an important thing in common. All of them have the same religion which is orthodox and in the period of Easter, every people are starting to be aware of the possibility to get lost from their own perception of the reality and to enter in a new one which is very different from what they know. The next reality is an imaginary one

„Sărbătoarea înseamnă pentru țăranul roman o totală dăruire și o sforțare continua către un punct de înaltă ascensiune și de regenerator contact. Sărbătoarea poate fi socotită o dăruire în timp a omului față de Dumnezeu, o legătură cu absolutul, prin care natura sa căzută se ameliorează, sărbtoarea e un timp sacru, în care om și natură se transfigurează; ea reprezintă prin excelență timpul creator prin care omul capătă puteri noi și faptele lui o altă semnificație decât cea obișnuită. Sărbătoarea, prin ritual și dincolo de el, cat imp calitativ, influențează lumea și viața." (Bernea, 2005, p. 227).

Easter, as any other important celebrations, represents a source of developments of rituals in Romanian society. Romanians are separated in this period by their present and they enter in a space which can be seen as a magical one. The first sign to enter in the period is the Lent itself.

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With forty days before Easter, people are starting to be aware of the spiritual time in which they enter and how Lent is applying on every part of the religious rituals Busu, 2015; Colhon, Cerban, Becheru & Teodorescu, 2016). Lent is more than a ban to eat food from animals. Lent is the time when people can clean themselves from their evil thoughts, they are entering in a period of austere. This period is preserve for cleaning the soul of Christians. Religion is the principal actor in Romanian society in this period. Easter Lent represents a rite of passage and it is considered to be the most difficult from the others. Here, the space is becoming magical and has a sacred value. Profane, in the time of Easter, is less and less seen and active through the people who are participate in the Lent's rituals.

In the cities, people are becoming to be more aware of religion and they accept its importance in Romanian society (Dumitru, Budica & Motoi, 2016; Siminică, Dumitru & Motoi, 2017; Frunza, 2017). So, through their participation in Lent's rituals, they are more and more approachable to the people from village. From a spiritual point of view, the citizen from cities can do the same spiritual values as the ones from the villages. They seek from Romanian customs in all the rituals that they are take part; their purpose is to form a new state where the real perception of people in society today.

„Dar omul nu trăiește singur; timpul său personal se încadrează și se desfășoare într-un timp social, mai mult chiar, într-un destin comun. În acest fel soarta omului este direct legată de aceea a grupului social, a poporului. Dacă în cazul unor oameni excepționali această condiție ce ține de coordonatele entice și sensul vieții comunității omenești se impune cu multă tărie, mai sigur ea este prezentată și active în cazul țăranului român care trăiește sub imperiul unor rânduieli tradiționale, așa cum mai prezintă unele sate izolate, de munte." (Bernea: 2005)

Bernea provides some information about the time of every man in a society. Lent is imposing people a sort of limit and it separates them from their personal time. In this time, they know a series of conditions in order to clean their soul from the bad thoughts. The Lents brings a need of knowledge and information from the religious point of view. People from Romania nowadays are in a continuous moving and because of that, they don't have any more time for what are the Romanian traditions and customs in the present. Romanians are constantly in a need to appreciate their traditions and in order to do that, they have to understand better what the purpose of Lent in society is. Romanian present society looks the feast as a ritual, but they need to participate in a more active way for the Lent actions to create a bond between present and past. Traditions are important for every Romanian, and to conserve them, they have to participate in every single one and to understand their importance. Without rituals, the traditions will get lost and also, Romanian society will have to borrow customs from other cultures, and their own culture will die. Because of that, there are small groups of people, especially the ones from the churches who they are holding the feast. The urban society know Romanian traditions, but it appreciates them in a more profane way and it may seem that it reject the religious customs.

„Spațiu, timp, cauzalitate la poporul român" că: „Timpul este deci la temelia actului ritualic. Săvârșind un astfel de act, țăranul român are de luat în seamă mersul timpului, care cere, după calitățile momentelor, anumite acte. Țăranul știe că numai prin respectarea timpului, adică prin săvârșirea actelor la vremea lor, aceste acte câștigă sens și se împlinesc cu adevărat. De aceea el respect riguros ceea ce numim noi condiția de timp." (Bernea: 2005)

The Easter feast marks a beginning of manifestations created in support of reaching the threshold to prepare people for the Revive of Jesus Christ. The Easter feast breaks the people from their daily routine and urges them to enter into a new world, different from theirs. Liminality is manifesting through the all period of feast. The threshold state become more an urge for people to detach from their reality and to enter in the period of feast where the activities are coordinating by church. The designation of a sacred space in the period before Easter is given by the appearance of religion in the foreground, both in the city and in the village. Turned off from their normal life, people are starting to feel more and more as a part of Romanian traditions and community. The Easter Feast basically brings together all the aspirations and values that people have in their past. The city is marked by the desire to revive old, powerful values in the minds of Romanians. Traditions of Easter is not lost as long as Romanians preserve their right to celebrate and to go through this kind of cultural revival. In fact, culture is the heart of a tradition. Of course, the city doesn't receive sacred and traditional values,

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but it has its own perception about how the feast is creating its own role in the present society. All the actions that are taking place at that time have sacred values, strongly rooted in the tradition of Orthodox society.

The time in the period of Lent is considered a sacred one (Ślusarczyk, Baryń & Kot, 2016; Kot, Tan & Dragolea 2017). In this period, people are trying to know their roots and their traditions in a more religious way. Religion becomes the center of symbolism of Easter even in the cities from Romania. Without church or without religion, this celebration can't exist. People are adapting to the new times, but they remain with their soul in the past, balancing the influences of religion over the most skeptical people. The cities are aware of the power of Easter over the perception of the people, and are conquered by religion. Through Lent, people are cleaning their soul.

Ion Ghinoiu, in his book „Obiceiuri populare de peste an. Dicționar" describes Lent as„o perioadă de 7 săptămâni cu interdicții alimentare, lipsită de petreceri și distracții care precedere sărbătoarea centrală a calendarului festiv creștin. Paștele, sinonim cu Păresimi.
Postul Mare este cel mai lung și cel mai sever din posturile de peste an (Crăciun, Sânpetru și Sântămăria, a fost initial numai de 40 de zile, începea la Lăsatul Secului și se încheia la Duminica FLoriilor. Ulterior Postul Mare s-a mărit cu Săptămâna Patimilor sau Săptămâna Floriilor." (Ghinoiu, 1997, p. 155).

Lent is concentrated on Christians rituals. In Romania nowadays, Lent doesn't have the same perception and influences as it had in the past, but remain the first major ritual of Easter in the present. People recognizes its values gave by the church. In the period of feast, we can see many people in churches that in the rest period of year. Easter is considered to be a celebration of God with sacred values and not just a marketing celebration in which people are involve in order to receive free days from work. People are celebrating Easter almost how the tradition says and are trying to involve in different types of actions and to see the good in everything.

I discovered however that many people from the cities don't want to participate in Lent as the Bible wrote. The people in the city are more likely not to hold fast because it is hard for them to impose certain limits on food living in a stressful environment. I wanted to see what the opinion of people about the feast is and I made a focus group. So, I notice that they know the Easter traditions, and the feast as an important part of the celebration, but their time does not allow them to participate. They prefer to keep a day or two days a week, preferably on Wednesdays and Fridays. This makes feel more comfortable with the fact that they understand the importance of the Easter and Lent. I asked them how they feel during this period. They responded that they became in the last years more aware of faith during fasting, of God's presence in Easter rituals. Since they started to hold fast and entered the period of their maintenance, they broke up from the pre-life and entered a rite of passage Easter is constructing on a series of rituals that are meant to bring a plus value to the traditional faith. Romanian tradition changes the perception of people from profane to sacred in the period of feast. The church is becoming the central institution for all the Christians who are celebrate Easter: "Ca jerfă la biserică se duc colaci și lumânără, plătindu-se și preotului ca să pomenească la proscomedie numele crediniciosului, în rugăciunele ce le face la sf liturghie. Dacă e pentru sănătate, în Mihalcea să dau atât colaci, cât și banii cu soț, dar dacă dacu pentru morți, fără soț. Preotul să roagă pentru sufletul mortului și-l pomenește, scoțându-l astfel de la pedeaspsa șid e la greu. În părțile de sus ale Bucpvinei, locul colacilor l-au luat niște franzole mici, rotunde; numai când e pomenire mai mare să fac colaci." (Niculiță-Voronca: 1998)

Another interesting fact about Lent is that: „Cine postește tot postul, în ziua de Paști trebuie să se ferească de a mânca mult. Ouă să nu manance deloc; să bea o ceașcă de zamă limpede, de supă bună- cum se face la Paști, de clapon-, iar din celăallte bucate să mănânce tot cu cruțare." (Niculiță-Voronca: 1998).
Lent is inducing people the idea that the soul cleaning is the most important thing that they have to do until Easter. This cleaning is reliable as a base for the Easter celebration. According to the traditions, a true Christian must welcome the Revive of Jesus Christ with clean soul and his thoughts far away from secular. Thus, every rite of passage in the period of feast is essentially in people's path to soul cleaning. Nowadays Romania seek to promote these customs. The city has faded away from

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the tradition and is more open to other cultures, so that it leads to a distortion of the understanding of Romanian own customs. In the present, Romanian children are growing in an environment when the rabbit had become the symbol of Easter. Secular of this celebration becomes a priority for those in the urban environment, particularly affected, seem to be children. The profane affects the Easter tradition and thus leads to an erroneous interpretation of them.

„În colectivitățile tradiționale, obiceurile dădeau un ritm propriu vieții. Respectarea lor, practicarea lor după rânduiala îndatinată imprima vieții colective, familiei și în general vieții sociale a satului o anumită cadență. În perioada muncilor agricole ele stabileau un echilibru între muncă și odihnă, prin etapele care marcau sfârșitul anumitor munci și pregătirea pentru altele. (Pop: 1999)

Easter, unlike other Easter rituals, is not reflected everywhere. He counts on humility, modestly, without boasting. Those who keep the feast must be humble in their actions. In urban areas, it is difficult for people to adapt to austere and to the fact that they have to behave in a humbler way. The feast is seen as a humble ritual, an austere one. Because of that, the rituals of feast have a sacred value, and also a profane one if we think about it. In our society which is attacked by other cultures and their cultural elements had managed to impose in our culture the necessity of borrowing different sort of tradition which is not meant for us. People are concentrating their attention on the mechanism of marketing the celebration of Easter. I spoke with a group of people from different social classes and ages to see if the feast is holding in the present. People told me that the feast for them is just a ritual where they don't eat meat, but they can't hold it in all the period until Easter. In fact, feast for them is more like a diet. This means that they see the feast from a profane point of view, not sacred. They don't allow themselves to understand the fact that the feast is hold by religion and it's not representing just a tradition and a restriction to food from animals. In my discussion with the people I managed to create two groups: the first who are from villages and the ones who are from the cities. The first ones are more aware of the religion values of the feast and they considered that it's a bless from the point of view of spirituality. But as I thought, people who were born in the cities don't recognize the feast as an important spiritual meaning. They are aware of its marketing because of the abundance of feast food in markets and everywhere.

From my point of view, I hold the feast just a couple of days, not all the period. And like me, there are many people. They understand the feast's importance and its affecting the society, but they don't spiritually value it.

I started from the idea that the Lent is seen by the people in our society as a conservation of traditions, in this case- the celebration of Easter. People are searching for an equilibrium between profane and sacred, where they chose in this period to be almost in both in the same time. I observed that many Romanian are choosing to celebrate Easter in locations as Maramures where the tradition is conserving even in our days. They are searching for old values in our time. But before they celebrate the Easter they, many of them are choosing to seek to their soul, to return to the most important ritual: feast. Through feast, they are cleaning their soul, they are searching for the good in every aspect of life and they are trying to do good things to the world in return for receiving the Revive of Jesus Christ with a clean mind and soul. For all Romanians, Easter represent a returning to innocence, a rebounding of them with their childhood and their time when nothing bad happened. This returning to the past is creating in fact another dimension of time where people don't want any more to stay in the present.

As I managed to understand from the people who I talked, I understood that they seek to find the origin of the traditional values in the present society. Even they all are living in the cities, the village represents for them the true place for Easter to be celebrated. Most of the people are trying in the period of feast to understand better this phenomena are to seek questions about their own perception about the religion. Easter is holding the religion. Or we can say that Easter is based on religion. Without religion, Easter will have just a marketing value and people from Romania will borrow forever the cultural elements from other cultures. Romania must understand the importance of traditions and customs and must teach to the next generations that without their participations in the rituals, all of what is true and sacred for Romanian will get lost.

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What's important for our society? To borrow cultural elements from other countries or to try to conserve their own traditions and customs? Sure, we can say obviously that the second is the most important. And it is true. But

3. Conclusion

The ritual of the Easter Lent is representing a necessity for people in order to achieve the churches' rituals. The Lent is the most important threshold for all the Christians. Arnold Van Gennep (2011) considered that people are facing a transformation in entering the liminality. And in the case of Easter Lent, the rite of passages has a sacred significance. The fast is more than just a restraint in food. It brings a desired humility and a modesty in their actions.

Of all the people, I spoke with during Easter, few of them said that they participate in all the Lent rituals. Most people understand Easter as a celebration who is closer to religion than the others and have many rules. In order for the people to enjoy Easter, they have to be a part of society's rituals and to understand better the Romanian traditions. Romanian present society has to know and to understand the values of traditions and customs even in the cities where their perception is less seen as a religious one.

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