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ANTHROPOLOGY

ETHNIC SELF-IDENTIFICATIONS IN THE FOLK TRADITIONS OF FIVE MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN ROMANIA

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In the study below, we will discuss on five ethnic communities in Romania, namely the Kalderash (Brateiu, Sibiu), the Russian-Lipovans (Jurilovca, Tulcea), the Rudari (Băbeni, Vâlcea), the Sachsen (Cisnădioara, Sibiu), and the Szeklers (Korond, Harghita). All these communities are presented from the perspective the symbols or patterns of culture, social organization, and traditional economy that are relevant for local ethnic self-identification. Our objective is to provide field-based evidences for the manners in which ethno-cultural identities are currently engaged in Romania, within particular traditions regularly expressed by means of folk arts. Information for this study has been collected during research campaigns pursued in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2010, basically relying on ethnographic interviews taken among local interlocutors in the abovementioned five locations. The results of our work point to the importance of traditional crafts and occupations for the making of distinct ethnic "profiles" in each case, in the context of living together with Romanian groups and of the modernization of rural life (such as through the tourism industry).

Keywords: ethnic minority, traditional crafts, Romania

In what follows, we present the results of our own case studies on Szekler, Sachsen, Kalderash, Russian-Lipovan and Rudars from five distinct localities of our country, in an attempt to understand ethnic identity first in its cultural diversity, beyond theoretical generalizations foreign to the communities studied (or subgroups related to them). Each of these communities appeared to us, therefore, in a series of particularities (in areas like the crafts, the social or legal organization, traditional economy and folk arts), which we recorded as such, (re)narrating them only as an echo of what, *in situ*, was transmitted or "revealed" to us by our interlocutors.

1. FOLK ART OF THE SZEKLER PEASANTS FROM KOROND VILLAGE (HARGHITA COUNTY)[1]

Comprising a majority Szekler population (6185 people, out of a total of 6394 inhabitants)[2], the community of Korond is famous not only for pottery, but also for other folk crafts (wood carving and painting, wick processing) and especially for a rich ethnic mythology and folklore equally various in its forms of expression (such as ethno-historical anthroponymy, ethnographic poetics, and toponymy).

Ceramics is the main occupation of many Korondans, with a history of more than four centuries (according to local cultural memory), including intergenerational family specialization, socialist cooperation, and entrepreneurship represented after 2000 by the *Eletfa* ("Tree of Life") potters' association. The hands of the potters from Korond give life to a rich variety of ceramic forms such as cuttings, cups, large and small plates, large flower vases, pots, etc.

Figure 1. Szekler potter GT, working by the potter's wheel in his home workshop from Korond village (Photo: Marin Constantin).

In the ceramic ornamentation from Korond, we can first mention naturalistic decorative themes, inspired (according to our interlocutors) by the flora and fauna of the local ecosystem of the Praid Depression. Among such motifs (which we quote from the transcripts of our interviews) are "birds and flowers [in general]", "tulip (tulip flower), and daisy". In the thematic inventory of the ceramic painting from Korond, the "Tree of Life" supports the rich imagery of folk Christianity ("The Tree of Life... in the middle with a cross, and in front two stags, carrying the sun between their horns..."), while also carrying genealogical meanings ("[Through] the 'Tree of Life'... the family is presented... the woman, the man... therefore the family") (AP, VP).

[1] Please see also (M. Constantin, 2016).

[2] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2: Resident population according to ethnicity, in counties, towns, and communes, at the 1st of December 2021).

The Korond ceramic representations are distinguished not only by the plastic mirroring of the environment, but (or especially) by the association of these themes with the mythology and ethno-history of the Szekler ethnic group. The "Stag" motif is defining with regard to the echo of local traditions about the beginnings of Hungarian colonization in Transylvania. The sacredness that (in the narratives of the potters from Korond) the stag – *szarvas* – embodies is argued by defining it as a "crowned animal", to which the Hungarians and the Szekler have to "worship" (VP, JLZ). The Korondan potters describe the stag as a guiding animal that would have shown the Hungarians the way to follow, during their journey to Europe.

Unlike the *Stag* (situated in the Christian and civilizing context of "Saint King Ladislaus [1040–1095]", founder of urban life), another decorative motif – the "Turul Bird" – clearly belongs to an archaic cultural background, before the "Europeanization" and Christianization of the Hungarian tribes. A local ceramist (JL) assumes a "connection" between the Turul and what he calls the "eagle" from a ceramic representation of the coat of arms of historical Transylvania (with the seven fortresses and the eagle in the upper quarter, flanked by the sun and the moon). This interpolation of a mythological relic in the heraldry of the Transylvanian principality is probably the fruit of a late *interpretatio hungarica* on the medieval intra-Carpathian evolution of the Hungarians.

Such decorative "index" (illustrated here only by a few examples) belongs rather to an "ethnographic continuum" than to a proper historical chronology. Indeed, among the scenes of traditional life on the flattened plates painted by one of the local potters, one can observe the *Szekler Wedding*, in a frieze-like representation of the procession of the bride and groom, wedding guests and fiddlers, within several ceremonial sequences juxtaposed on the inner surface of the ceramic piece. *Young man and young woman at the Hora dance* is another theme of the same craftsman, one illustrated on the chromatics of the popular clothing of the region, as is the case with some figurines rendered in the self-esteem of their social status. The clay statues – *agyagszobor* – modeled by another ceramist – highlight a similar expressiveness of the peasantry "from these lands, Szeklerland…" (VG); The aforementioned ceramist claims that his characters are molded after those observed "somewhere, in the field, or [...] in the forest...", ending up constituting small galleries of portraits remarkable both for their diversity and for their belonging to local community life: *Old Szekler*, *Woodcutters*, *Reapers*, *Fiddlers at the pub*... In the art of the Korondans, clay thus becomes the support of artisanal reflection on a sociality of yesterday, today, and (perhaps) forever.

Like ceramists, "wooden" artisans sometimes resort to floral or animalistic motifs, significant for the popular meditation on the surrounding nature and the place of man within it (*tulip, rose, daisy, lily of the valley*...) In a work by such a carver (*The Szekler Pillar*), motifs such as *the Forests*, *Mountains*, *the Sun* and *the Moon* contribute to the localization of the represented thematic universe in "Szeklerland", as (in another work, *Szekely Himnusz*, the "Szekler Hymn") the story of a "small band of Szeklers" that "King Csaba" leads in "not to let Transylvania be lost" is embedded; in a creation entitled *The Coat of Arms of Hungary from the Time of Kossuth*, the same artisan renders the name "Hungary"

in the old *Róvásírás* script, with archaic "signs" – *jelek* – that "must be read backwards [...] from right to left" (VP).

The art of the *táplo* processors, in fact molders of a mushroom (*Fomes fomentarius*), grown on the bark of local beech or birch trees, and harvested during summer or autumn, develops ethno-historical themes about the origins of this craft in Korond, alongside motifs such as *the Moon*, *the Sun* and *the Stars*, accompanied by a *Bird* associated with the "pairs of falcons" which, "200 years ago", the Korondans would hand over to the local authorities.

Finally, folk legends from Korond evoke (as narrated by JLZ) the origin of the village in connection with the symbolism of the local deer but also with the religious tradition about the unification of the Szekler communities around the village's Catholic church, in the times of King Saint Stephen (997–1038). The mythology of the *Turul Bird* is, once again, highlighted in the narratives about the migration of the Hungarian tribes from Asia, "in this land, between the Carpathians".

In strict terms of historical development, it is difficult to establish a "periodicity" of the "episodes" and "characters" "staged" in the folk art of modern-day Korond. After all, what the Szekler potters do (by the "objectification"[3] proper to local craftsmanship) is not so much the reconstruction of a more or less distant past, but above all the recognition of a prestigious ancestry and bringing it (with the means of art) into contemporaneous times. Such a "memorial communion" of the bearers of the ceramic craftsmanship from Korond gives the measure of their consent to their own tradition, in this case by combining and "synchronizing" the *Turul Bird* (JL) with *the Hussars* (JL), the *Royal Hunt* (VP) with *the Szekler Wedding* (JL), the "crusader" *Lancer* (AP) with the *Village Girl and the Ox Cart* (VG), and so on.

2. *NACHBARSCHAFT* AS CULTURAL MEMORY TO THE SACHSEN OF SOUTHERN TRANSYLVANIA[4]

In the context of the demographic involution of the German-speaking population in Romania, from a number of 59,764 ethnics in 2002 to 22,907 in 2021[5], the institution of traditional *Nachbarschaft*-type neighborhood is presented here in the case of Sachsen from two localities in Sibiu County (Cisnădioara / Michelsberg, where at the beginning of the 2000s the number of Germans was

[3] In the interpretation of the British archaeologist Daniel Miller, the concept of objectification reveals "[...] the dialectical interaction between the ordering of objects [by the bearers of a culture] and the situation of being [as a bearer of that culture] ordered by them"; given that "[...] the meanings of artifacts have always been correlated with their positioning within symbolic systems", the aforementioned researcher argues that "objectification" (as an understanding of the importance of "material forms" in the articulation of personal identity, in traditional and industrial societies alike) - contributes to overcoming the "dualism" or "reductionism of approach" between "persons and things, or between gifts and commodities" (D. Miller 1994: p. 417).

[4] Please see also (M. Constantin 2015).

[5] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2).

estimated at approximately 100) and Cisnădie / Heltau (with a community of 187 Germans in the 2021 census[6]).

When, nowadays, the Sachsen of Michelsberg and Heltau are interviewed about their past (see Constantin 2016), they evoke the "eight centuries of existence" of ethnic Germans in southern Transylvania, as a "long duration" considered to confer historical legitimacy to what was initially a community of colonists of the Hungarian royalty, and remained a permanent minority group in the area. With the prestige of "the first [Saxon] landowner" (due to the services he brought to the Hungarian state), the founding figure of a *Magister Gozelinus* is still present as a toponym naming the central square of Michelsberg (MHN). In 1223, Gozelinus – a priest from Wallonia – is mentioned in connection with the church of Michelsberg, together with the local fortress, which he is said to have donated to the Kerz Monastery (Cârţa, in Braşov County) (TB). For more than 200 years, until 1474 (according to information from the current municipal administration of Michelsberg), the village population was subject to a regime of serfdom in relation to the Kerz Monastery.

After the adoption of Lutheranism in the 16th century, the Church would come to represent the "first structure" in the local Sachsen community, with the priest playing a central role in the school formation of the new generations. Lutheranism is described today (by MHN, a local ceramist specialized in the making of *cahle*, ceramic tiles for traditional stoves) as an "essence of Christianity", within a Eucharist in which bread, wine and the "spiritual" light of the sun are considered fundamental values.

Figure 2. Ceramist MHN and one of his ceramic tiles (*cahle*), in his home workshop from Michelsberg (2010) (Photo: Marin Constantin).

Ethno-historical or folkloric knowledge about the medieval past of the Southern Transylvanian Saxons is complemented by data from recent Saxon history, including (for example) the use of folk *shawls* or barks (woven by local

[6] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2).

craftsmen) for the German army during World War II, then the burial of German soldiers from that time at the Michaelis Church (which has become a memorial site), the mass deportation of adult members of this minority to the Soviet Union, the replacement of Sachsen folk traditions by the "construction of socialism" in Romania, and the assistance provided by Sachsen who emigrated to Austria to their relatives who remained in socialist Romania.

As a recurring discursive theme, *Nachbarschaft* – the traditional institution of local neighbourhoods – is one of the most familiar notions among Sachsen, in that they often use it in the course of broader testimonies about their community and history[7]. According to our interlocutors, in post-war Michelsberg, there were several *Nachbarschaften*, named (by AF) in association with neighborhoods such as: *Akernachbarschaft* ("Masons' Neighborhood"), *Bachnachbarschaft* ("Village-Creek Neighborhood") and *Obernachbarschaft* ("Upper Village Neighborhood"). Among villagers, *Nachbarschaften* also reflected the social symbolism of local topography, as in the case of the "Village Center Neighborhood", or in that of the "Neighbourhood beyond the village church". In Heltau, while the *Nachbarschaften* retained their "street" brand of belonging, their structuring followed the criterion of association by age, in the case of three "Neighbourhoods of the Elderly" and one "Neighbourhood of the Youth". The composition of a *Nachbarschaft* generally varied around a few dozen "neighbours" (for example, 70 in the *Akernachbarschaft*, 120 in another *Nachbarschaft* in Michelsberg, and 40–60 in Heltau). Access to a Neighbourhood was generally conditioned by the marital status of the members and by the Saxon ethno-confessional identity.

Even after marriage, men and women had their own gendered Neighbourhood. Alongside the *Nachbarschaften*, youth "brotherhoods" – *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* – also existed in Michelsberg, in connection with the Christian rite of Confirmation (among the local Evangelical Saxons), when the teenagers in the village experienced their fourteenth birthday (MHN); *Bruderschaft* and *Schwesterschaft* included the young people of Cisnădioara up to the time of marriage (MD, KF).

In Michelsberg and Heltau, the Neighborhoods had an internal structure, with specialized roles for the participants, which demonstrates the institutional and customary character of such associations. In Michelsberg, the leader of a *Nachbarschaft* was called *Nachbarsvater*, and in Heltau, *Haan* / *Nachbarhaan* / Oberhaan. *Nachbarsvater* (along with *Nachbarschaftmutter*) represented some transmissible functions, exercised as such among the Neighbours for two to four years, after they were recognized as members of the respective organization. Among

[7] In a study of the Sachsen Neighborhoods in the city of Sibiu in the 16th century, described as part of a larger apparatus of Sozialdisziplinierung, implemented and maintained by the local council, the Lutheran church, and the city guilds, Mária Pakucs inferes that "[...] the town ordinances, which were intended to discipline and educate the entire community of citizens, together with guild and neighborhood articles that regulated the life smaller groups of individuals, can be seen as a coherent and convergent effort by all these institutions to create an ideal society." (M. Pakucs 2004: 176).

the prerogatives and tasks of a *Nachbarsvater* were convening the Neighbours and communicating with the local priest on behalf of the Neighbourhood, or collecting the Neighbours' monetary contributions to the *Nachbarschaft* and providing a public meal for all the Neighbours in his association.

In exercising their mandate, the *Nachbarsvater* / *Nachbarhaan* were assisted by a Neighbourhood Council (including, among others, a secretary and a treasurer) (KF). While the secretary wrote the current reports of a *Nachbarschaft*, the treasurer kept track of the Neighbourhood's membership fees (used for mutual aid, such as in cases of illness or funeral, as well as in sponsoring the reconstruction of a Neighbour's house destroyed in a fire). Each *Nachbarschaft* had its own statutes, specifying the social rights and obligations of all Neighbours. Together with the council, the *Nachbarsvater* / *Nachbarhaan* kept custody of the "Neighbourhood Chest" – basically, a storage chest with the documents and resources of that Neighbourhood (MHN, TB).

In this framework, sanctions could be applied to those Neighbours who were found guilty against each other. For example, a Neighbour risked paying a fine if he was absent from the funeral of a fellow villager from the same *Nachbarschaft* (MD). Also, transgressors of public norms in a Neighbourhood would ask for clemency from the governing council of that *Nachbarschaft*, a forum sometimes associated with an ordinary court. Refusal to respect the rules of a Neighbourhood could entail excommunication or even expulsion from the village! However, it was the joint efforts and solidarity of the members of a *Nachbarschaft* that mattered most for their community conscience.

Elections for the leadership of the Neighborhood – in particular, for the role of *Nachbarsvater* / *Nachbarhaan* – took place each February, in the ritual context of the Sachsen carnival (*Fasching*), when the *Nachbarschaften* celebrated their cohesion, with a community march and in the company of *Reiter* (young riders) wearing their folk costumes of "knights" (MHN, EH). On such occasions, music and dance were performed in accordance with Sachsen traditions, while the German language was the only means of communication (even in cases where the Saxons belonged to mixed families).

More than a nostalgic reminiscence about the rituals of youth or about the traditions of the age and German-speaking groups in Michelsberg and Heltau, the evocations of the Neighbourhoods of the past can be considered a persistent *performative memory* among today's Sachsen, thus affirming their needs for cultural survival as a demographically declining ethnic group in the 2000s Romania.

3. TRADITIONAL GYPSY COURT IN BRATEIU (SIBIU COUNTY)[8]

According to the 2021 census, out of the 3,333 inhabitants of Brateiu commune, 486 consider themselves to be ethnic Roma[9]. Our initial ethnographic

[8] Please see also (M. Constantin 2017).

interest in this community was related to the traditional craft of copper processing (*cuprărie*, coppersmith's craft, in a local Romanian formula) that the coppersmiths of Brateiu continue to practice today, as they did in the past, including during the years of Romania's socialist history. In addition to copper craftsmanship, the coppersmiths of Brateiu offer a wealth of narrative information about another institution that belongs to their ethno-cultural heritage, namely the Gypsy court (*Kris*).

Figure 3. Kalderash coppersmith AC (Brateiu), while making one of his cauldrons (2010) (Photo: Marin Constantin).

According to a recent interpretation of the distribution of *Kris* in Central and Eastern Europe, "all Roma groups that do not know the Gypsy court are definitively settled [non-nomadic], while "[...] all groups that have a Gypsy court speak Romani, but not all groups that speak Romani have such a court" (E. Marushiakova 2007: 71–73). To the extent that this classification is accurate, nomadism and vernacular language are key ethnographic elements associated with the persistence of customary law, in an institutionalized manner, in Roma groups. From a historical perspective, *Kris* is equated with the state of Roma slavery in the Romanian Late Middle Ages, which would explain why, in the context of local feudalism, customary law ultimately contributed to the preservation of the autonomy of Roma communities (T. Acton *et al.* 1997: 247).

In contemporary Kalderash narratives about *Kris* and *Stabor*, they essentially describe a customary judicial practice that, based on traditional values, is meant to manage community issues related to one's marital status as well as one's public life. While *Kris* is most often understood as the "Gypsy court," *Stabor* generally

[9] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2).

indicates the quorum of such a court (see, for example, *Stabor* designating a "commission of judges" among the Kalderash from Oltenia (M. Preda *et al.* 2015: 74) or "justices of the peace" in the Kalderash community from Săruleşti – Călăraşi (A. Popescu 2013).

In fact, *Kris* could be characterized as an auxiliary institution to the family value system of the Kalderash people, starting with the moment of one's engagement, continuing with the daily life of one's family and even (when necessary) with the issues of divorce. In the following, *Stabor* is presented from the perspective of the local participants and their ethnicity, by highlighting the Kalderash way of life, the customary customs associated with it (with the localization and classification of cases) and the relationship of the Roma subgroup in Brateiu with other public institutions in Romania (such as the police and the city hall).

In practice, *Kris* can be held at home, in a private context, as well as in a public setting, such as the village hall or simply the street. The testimonies of locals from Brateiu estimate a number of up to twelve-to fourteen participants among men with a respected status at the village level, either elders or younger heads of household (TC). In the communities of Kalderash from Oltenia, the *Stabor* staff includes (along with the local leader, the *Bulibaşa*) "seven to eight members" (M. Preda *et al.* 2015: 74). In describing what can be called the "generic" functioning of a Kris, the Kalderash insist on the conciliatory (*împăciuire*, peace-making) mission of their traditional "court" of justice. It is a mission linked mainly to the reproductive importance of the family, deeply rooted in the sense that the Kalderash give to the continuity of their community across generations (AC).

The *Kris* of Brateiu does not exercise any criminal decision-making powers in matters of homicide. One of our interlocutors (TC) from the community claims that, for more than 50 years, no criminal proceedings for murder have been applied to any member of his group, while other members of his ethnic group strongly declare their determination to respect official legislation in those situations that go beyond a "state of affairs" at the level of local private life (or what they believe belongs to customary judicial act).

The normative character of the *Kris* institution is accurately expressed in what one of our interlocutors cites as a public demand of the Kalderash regarding the "obedience [submissiveness]" of the women, and the "industry" of the men – in their marital unit (NC). According to this local, marital arrangements are agreed upon within the *Kris*, as a recognized authority that establishes and examines the ethical framework of the new couple's behavior. Within such a "framework", wives are required to submit to the will of their husbands both in the family and in society, while husbands have to demonstrate their commitment as leaders and supporters of their families.

More generally, the Kalderash *Stabor* is invested with a moral weight among all members of the local community. Indeed, the participants in a *Stabor* deliberation should discern the "truth" from the "lie" of the villagers investigated in a particular case. Acceptance of the truth is both the rational outcome of the *Stabor*

in a collective debate, and a sacred value reinforced by oath. Above all, the Kalderash from Brateiu claim that, given their "faith in God", *Kris* as a Romani "rule" obey the "Law of Jesus" (PG).

The Kalderash invoke the consultative authority of their elders, regularly seen as community leaders and "public voices" empowered by their intergenerational membership in the local Roma group (NC). According to a native (son of such an elder in Brateiu), the elders in his village acted as an "advisory" body; as a result, he finds it appropriate to compare this to the "prosecutor's office" during an official investigation. In particular, the outstanding personality of *Bulibaşa* (traditional community chief) is usually invoked regarding his influential role during Stabor convocation (AC). *Bulibaşa*'s position as "judge" within the *Stabor* in the Brateiu community highlights his prerogatives in establishing compensations or cash payments in favor of one or another of the marriage partners and their families, when they have decided to separate.

As with other customary judicial gatherings, the *Kris* in Brateiu is today considered more as part of the cultural heritage of the Gypsies, than as a still effective practice in the village. Local interlocutors (TC, NC) claim that since the Kalderash community now obeys Romanian law, the *Kris* "will disappear". Furthermore, according to other information, the role of *Bulibaşa* as a leader in Brateiu is now limited to the level of each family, with no longer being recognized as the president of the *Stabor*. The testimonies of the Kalderash interviewed suggest that the issue of the disappearance of the *Kris* in Brateiu must be understood in the context of an ongoing process of individualization of local Kalderash families, which, together with the diminishing role of the *Bulibaşa*, leads to the less frequent convening of a collectively recognized *Stabor*. This could reflect a more general change in the way customary law is agreed upon and enacted among Roma groups in Romania today.

4. THE LIPOVIANS' BELONGINGNESS TO THE DANUBE DELTA ECOSYSTEM[10]

For the Lipovan inhabitants of the Jurilovca community, their belongingness to the Danube Delta ecosystem in northern Tulcea County implies both the autochthonous specialization in local fishing, and the cultural integration into the ethnic and economic diversity of this region. According to the last census in Romania, in 2021 Jurilovca had 3694 inhabitants, of whom 1954 were Romanian, and 1465 Russian-Lipovans[11].

The biographical interviews we recorded in the field focused on the social, economic and cultural changes in Jurilovca, from the post-war period to the contemporary realities of our days. Our interlocutors were chosen taking into

[10] Please see also (M. Constantin 2015).
[11] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2).

account their quality as key informants, rather than the statistical representation of fishermen as a professional category in Jurilovca. A core assumption of our research was that Lipovan fishing could function not only as an isolated model of subsistence economy, but especially as a broader consciousness of ethnographic integration into the local ecology. Therefore, in collecting information about a "fishing village", beyond a discussion of what the fishing technique in Lake Razim and the Black Sea represents, we were interested in fishing as a way of life and as a worldview. Consequently, we asked Lipovan interlocutors to evoke their fishing experience through categories applicable to many other rural or urban groups – such as "ethnicity", "kinship", "work organization", and "product exchange" – in order to capture the relevance of fishing according to certain "items" of the general way of life in the community.

The Romanian and Lipovan groups explicitly preserve their Orthodox and Old-Believer identity (respectively), which does not exclude social relations and interdependence between the two communities. Intermarriage allows for such contacts, even if ethnic endogamy still seems to be a dominant marital model among Lipovans (IS, ESM). Like endogamy, fishing is recognized as the traditional way of life of the Lipovan population in Jurilovca, as an intergenerational occupation pattern that permanently defines their "community profile". Local biographical narratives emphasize the Lipovan preference for "ethnically homogeneous" teamwork, with restrictiveness towards other ethnicities, due to "linguistic barrier" reasons (IF, CG).

Figure 4: Romanian fisherman IR (Jurilovca) while fishing in Lake Razim (2010).
(Photo: Marin Constantin).

The intergenerational transmission of fishing boats within the family is regularly evoked by the Lipovan villagers of Jurilovca (PH, MH), sometimes with reference to the inheritance of boats and nets from parents to their descendants (ESM), as a livelihood resource for the newly established family. Kinship networks

can be seen not necessarily (only) as an "underdeveloped" or "traditional" phase in the history of fishing in Jurilovca, but also as a social adaptation of the local Lipovan community to the "modern" and centralized policies regarding fish exploitation in the Danube Delta and the Black Sea.

In evoking their own past, the Lipovans strongly associate their settlement in the area (as a result of their migration from Russia, in circumstances of religious persecution) with the practice of fishing (IS, ESM). Over the centuries, according to narratives from interlocutors like ES and IS, Jurilovca seems to have developed as a kind of "gift of the Danube Delta"; in any case, this village community highlights a case of historical ecology. The deltaic area may have initially represented a temporary, micro-regional choice for the Lipovans (as well as for local Romanian and Ukrainian communities). However, the making of fishing net was what (in the form of adaptive behaviour) would transform the deltaic ecosystem into a "niche" and a long-term fishing habitat, capable of developing the future livelihoods of the families of the newcomers.

Following the annual calendar of their work, the Lipovan villagers of Jurilovca alternate between lake and sea fishing in accordance with legal norms, which involves tools and fish species specific to each work context (IF). Native knowledge of fish species proves to be decisive for using the appropriate tool for fishing in the Delta or the Sea (the *dalian*, for small species: *anchovy*, *sardine*, *horse mackerel*; the net made of a rarer mesh, for *crucian carp*, for *carp*, *zander*, *bream*, *perch*, *pike*) (MH, IR).

The Lipovans of Jurilovca do not consider themselves to be a socio-economic enclave, to refer instead to their connections with the agricultural villages in the vicinity of the Danube Delta. Agriculture and viticulture are thus described as seasonal outlets for the locals who choose to work for the agricultural owners in Dobroudja region (ESM). The memories of the locals contain information about their exchange activities in nature, practiced by them in the past, mainly based on fish offered for agricultural products from the same hinterland (AM).

Under socialism, fishing remained the main occupation of Lipovans, and the distribution of fish was entirely in the hands of the state. In fact, the state is remembered as the only "client" (i.e. the employer and working partner at the same time) of local fishermen, in a state-run fishing industry (MH, PF). Lipovans from Jurilovca constantly affirm the efficiency of the organization of production within the fishing unit "Piscicola" which (as an employer of 500 local fishermen) provided each one with the necessary tools and managed the smooth implementation of the plan (the quota of fish that had to be caught by each fishing brigade).

On the contrary, in post-socialist Romania, where (in 1990) the Romanian government established the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (ARBDD), and where the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve was included in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere program (1991), locals such as IC and CI evoke their own environment through divergent arguments of the ancestral ecosystem versus the administrative

regime of concessions in fishing areas (such as at Lake Razim)[12]. This fact prevails over a real concern for the "natural heritage" and the "international [ecological] importance" of the Danube Delta, as such notions are described in the official legislation regarding the local "biosphere" "reserve". Local customary norms (the "unwritten law of the lake") contradict what Romanian and international legislation emphasizes as the "natural resources" of the Danube Delta (fish, birds, reeds, etc.), with little concern for the rural communities living there - as if they did not belong to the local "biodiversity reserve".

5. WOODCARVING AMONG THE RUDARI IN BĂBENI (VÂLCEA COUNTY) [13]

As with other Roma subgroups, there is no clear estimate of the number of Rudari in Romania; in fact, Rudari do not even acknowledge their membership in any *Romani* community, and moreover, they claim to be "Romanians". There are numerous regional subdivisions of Rudars in Romania, such as Rudari in Oltenia and Muntenia, *Năieşi* or *Băniaşi* in Banat and Transylvania, and *Lingurari* in Moldova. *Băieşi*/*Băniaşi* are also recorded in Croatia and Serbia, as are *Lingurari* in the northern, east-central and western areas of Bulgaria. In addition, Rudari communities are associated with the Thracians in southern Bulgaria, the *Intreans* in northern Bulgaria, and the *Dobrogeans* (a so-called population from Dobroudja area)[14].

We will continue to refer to the mono-craft specialization in woodcarving, from the town of Băbeni (recently promoted to the rank of "town") in Vâlcea county. In demographic terms referring to the 2021 census data, Băbeni has a population of 7570 inhabitants, of whom 6324 are Romanians and 279 are Roma[15]. The presence of woodcarvers in Băbeni can only be approximated, according to the information provided by local interlocutors, ranging from "10" to "30" families that would be engaged in woodcarving (MB, ID), up to "500–600" families that make up the entire woodcarver community as a separate neighborhood of the village, *Valea Mare*.

The Rudari from Băbeni (DC, ID, LD) prefer to correlate their cultural identity with the craft of woodcarving, which (as they point out) would explain some of their ethnonyms, such as those of *albier* and de *trocar* (from *troacă de pâine*, shape for cooking bread). From another perspective, the Rudari (ID) insist that their specialization in woodcarving (*lemnărie*) could be accessible to

[12] On a broader scale of analysis, the study of the ecosystems of the Danube Delta, the Nemunas Delta an Lake Kerkini (Greece), compared to the similar biodiversity of Lake Pihlajavesi (Finland), proves the need for an "integrated management of European delta areas", based in particular on "collaboration between those who design and implement conservation programs, and local communities" (S. Bell *et al.* 2004).

[13] Please see also (M. Constantin 2016).

[14] Information for the regional ethnonymes of Rudari (for Romania) is referred to (K. Kovalcsik, 2007) and (M. Slavkova, 2005). Further data concerning the *Băieşi/Băniaşi* from Croatia and Serbia, as well as the *Lingurari* from Bulgaria are provided by (E. Marushiakova and P. Popov 2013).

[15] *Romanian 2021 Census* (Table 2.02.1 and Table 2.02.2).

Romanians only on the condition of intermarriage between the two communities, with the Romanian partner having to learn the Rudari craft from an early age. In any case, the co-ethnicity ("race") of the Rudari spouses increases the potential for their "collaboration" in woodcarving (ID). The same craft is seen as highlighting the kinship groups still dedicated to woodworking (as is the case of the Băbeni themselves), in contrast to the Rudari who no longer continue such a tradition, for example those in the cities of Drăgăşani and Slatina (MB).[16]

Woodcarving is a central element of the Rudar civilization, through its contribution to the creation of a distinct lifestyle, within which the craft is still seen as deeply meaningful and "functional". According to a local woman (MB), the low wooden stools and table that she sells at fairs continue to be used effectively in the everyday lives of her fellow villagers. Local carvers (IL, ID) recall aspects of their old folk culture, still considered a kind of prototype in the creation of "new" artefacts. Another woman (VL, wife of IL) thus evokes the *găvan* (a bowl for crushing garlic), the *ladle* and the wooden spoons, all of which are related to the old life, or the *viaţa veche*, the old times when such a tool was valued for its practical, not just artistic, use.

Figure 5. Rudar woodcarver IL (Băbeni) while working in his home workshop (2010) (Photo: Marin Constantin).

[16] As a sign of collective identity, craftsmanship is widespread among the subgroups of rudars in Southeastern Europe (see, for example, the Albieri and Rotari from Oltenia (K. Kovalcsik, 2007: 111), the Aurari, Fusari, Copanari [wooden bowl makers], the *Lingurari* and the *Ursari* from Bulgaria (E. Marushiakova, P. Popov, 1998), etc. Such ethnonyms have been generally interpreted as "occupational names" in the case of subgroups of Gypsies/ speakers of Romani dialects, thus reflecting their traditional occupations in the region (E. Marushiakova, P. Popov, 2013: 65–66).

The social organization model of the craft is within a narrow range of variation (husband and wife; husband, wife, sons and daughters-in-law; husband, wife, son, daughter-in-law and a married brother, with his own family, etc.) The division of labour is essential in such a domestic framework of activity, with men doing the difficult work of carving the "raw material", and women then shaping the small wooden artefacts; in addition, when men work at home, their wives go to fairs to sell the objects they have made (ID, LD, IL).

The craftwork of the Rudari can be generically described as an activity based on manual labor, through which local wood is transformed into a series of artefacts (bowls, chairs, spindles, spoons...), most of which are of traditional expression in the ethnography of North Oltenia. Our interlocutors (MB, ID), know how to attribute to any variety of wood they shape what could be called "use values", namely some practical functions in the daily economy of their community. For example, spoons are made of poplar wood, while bowls are carved from willow, and tables from linden. Willow is also suitable for making *albii*, wooden troughs, and beech is used to produce knives for chopping eggplant.

Such knowledge of substantial compatibility between material resources and artefact categories is realized through the specialized skill of woodcarvers. Working by one's own hands, without any mechanized technology in everything that involves wood processing, is held in high esteem among woodcarvers, to such an extent that it certifies their paternity of their own craftsmanship (this is also the meaning of the technical demonstrations given by craftsmen in workshops or at fairs) (ID, LD, IL, MB). The workmanship involves the use of tools such as the hatchets, the iron clamps, and the knives... legitimizing as such the craftsman's "style" or "imagination" of work – even if, as far as our interlocutors are concerned, woodcarving is most often the result of an "inheritance from father to son".

Trade is crucial in explaining the artisanal production of the Rudari and as a socio-economic pattern. The presence of the Rudari craftsmen at urban craft fairs reveals the interest of the Băbeni carvers not only to exhibit their carved wood objects, but also to find customers for them. The Rudari narratives about their recent past also contain data on the socialist organization of wood carving in the area (until 1989), the *Arta Populară* [Folk Art] cooperative in Râmnicu Vâlcea being evoked in this case (by MB, ID, IL, LD) as a centralized network of domestic craftsmen, who worked as a family, in exchange for a salary conditional on the number of artifacts produced, as well as with retirement rights for employees. After 1989, based on these traditional and socialist antecedents of their artisanal economy, the Rudari carvers had to adapt to the competitive nature of the market economy. By working on their own this time, they get to participate in fairs organized in cities throughout the country (Braşov, Bucharest, Constanţa, Sibiu, Târgu Mureş, Timişoara...) (ID, LD, MB, VL).

The sales strategies of the woodworkers are diverse, from "clarifying" customers about the attributes of the wood they process, and from recommendations made to

them for better preservation of the purchased artifacts (such as anointing them with oil, by ID), to proving mastery of the craft, through demonstrations in front of tourists (VL, MB) and – in general – adapting the "beauty" of the crafted objects in relation to the tastes or pre-established sketches of the clientele. In the account of their "enrolment" in the market circuit, the woodworkers (for instance, ID) critically mention the "incorrect" attitude of what they call their "older" fellow villagers who, being invited to the city fairs, would not allow the "little ones" (namely: young artisans) to enter there; Such a practice is incriminated by the "abandonment of tradition" that it would cause to carvers at the beginning of their careers, who are then forced to work at "rubbish prices" for intermediary merchants in Transylvania.

CONCLUSIONS

We can see (in retrospect of the above) that craft people from minority ethnic groups do indeed "recognize", through their work and products, their cultural origin and belonging, thus expressing a kind of "worldview" specific to the mentioned ethno-linguistic communities. The distinct traditional profile, affirmed as such through craftsmanship, primarily defines the communities from Korond, Brateiu or Băbeni, but it was also maintained (until recently) through the social organization of the Sachsen Neighbourhoods and still today through the Lipovan fishing from Jurilovca. Among the Szeklers in Korond, the potters from Brateiu and the Rudari from Băbeni, ethnicity is practically included (along with other decorative themes) among the qualities that enhance and authenticity of artefacts made of clay and (respectively) copper and wood.

In terms of the socio-economic characteristics of traditional occupations, in Korond ceramics gather many of the attributes of a "dominant economy" ("certified" by the age and longevity of the local craft). Indeed, Szekler artisans develop a commercial circuit (especially through tourism) with Hungary, just as the Neighbourhoods of Michelsberg transmit to the new generations of southern Transylvanian Sachsen and their visitors from Germany not so much an ethno-history about something that "once was", but as an exemplary model of local sociality, capable of reviving together with the Sachsen consciousness of Southern Transylvania.

Craft specialization is another variable in assessing the relevance of handicraft for ethnic identity (the mono-specialization in ceramics in Korond, or the mono-specialization in fishing of the Lipovans in Jurilovca differs in weight from the craft economic alternative of the ethnic groups of Kalderash or Rudari, in their coexistence with the majority Romanians and their agricultural occupations). Crafts thus seem to branch out according to the ethnic plurality of a locality, while ethno-linguistic unity (or enclavization, in the case of the Szeklers and the Roma) tends to be associated with the practice of a single craft, or of a dominant craft.

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