

THE CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD IN TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN SOCIETY**DOI: <http://doi.org/10.26758/10.1.19>**

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Abstract

Objectives. Childhood and children has been the subject of research in anthropology, sociology and psychology only for a short while; previously, they were rather the object of attention of doctors, pedagogues, childcare workers. The approach of this area of study in the social sciences is conducted either in the form of research on children (including here the anthropological structuralist perspective) or, more recently, within a type of research with children, in which research data are the perceptions and definitions of children, their participation and decisions in social life.

Material and methods. This paper is a structuralist investigation. According to the ethnographic data of Romanian researchers, childhood, through rites of passage or other types of social thresholds of other ages, is not only a separate stage, but also a way of social existence and a self-sufficient cultural type compatible in the highest degree with the village community's culture.

Results. In the traditional Romanian society, children are not developing adults, but social actors and generators of culture with specific ways of expression and particular types of activity and statutes, both in the family and in the community space, or in the mythical universe.

Conclusions. Correct knowledge of childhood culture and its comparison with the stereotypes that adults have about children and childhood can support solving certain problems pertaining to the subject of generational interdependence.

Keywords: child, childhood, family, culture, adoptive age.

Introduction

European societies are aging, while they experience a technical, informational and social progress. Children are, in spite of increasingly better living conditions, fewer and fewer, as the populations grow older. Many European societies, the European Union as a whole, are losing children (statistically), in exchange for an increasing percentage of older people (Eurostat, 2016). For more than 5 years in a row, in Romania too, the number of people over 65 has exceeded the number of children under 15 – a phenomenon which in demography is beginning to be known as demographic extinction. Traditional societies, with high birth and death rates, dominated by the ages of youth and childhood, are now looking for other solutions and social and cultural models that will make them work with a totally different age structure than they have known for

hundreds of years.

Modern studies on childhood begin with the 20th century, due to the emergence of paediatrics, childcare, psychology, *i.e.* those areas through which the tools of raising children are transferred from the family to the specialized institutions of society. However, the reason for the emergence of these areas, *i.e.* the emphasis on systematic concern for children, originates – according to studies of the history of mentalities – a long time ago, with the discovery of the "moment" of children as a social class (Ariès, 1960; 1975). It is the period when the urbanization of Western societies is perfect and the way to modernization is open. A new feeling towards childhood (which historians have called "the privatization of childhood") begins to manifest itself since the 15th and the 16th centuries and especially during the 17th century: the "new child" of modernity that is born is more caressed by parents, more casual than the previous children. The English philosopher John Locke wrote in his work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) that parents too passionate about their children distort generations with the pampering they practice in family life. Dr. Jacques Duval speaks in 1612 with contempt or disgust about "that curious zeal that urges (mothers – our note) to hug and kiss their child. It is acknowledged that, through this curious behaviour, they show a monkey-like love, which, it is said, consists in hugging their chicks so hard that it suffocates them" (Ariès and Duby, 1995, VI:17). These conclusions can indicate both a novel maternal behaviour in the era, more affectionate than in previous eras, but also the social "discovery" of motherhood. In the new union of the sexes in urban housing and in the urban environment, men and foreigners (doctors, especially, whose presence is becoming increasingly important) witness hitherto hidden aspects in the highly specialized sexual space of the medieval peasant household (in female and male areas); and one of these novel aspects is the relationship between mother and child.

Philippe Ariès' work on childhood entitled *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life* (original title: *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, 1960, 1975; translated into English in 1962) was a major success in contemporary anthropology. Under his influence, specialists explain the phenomenon of "children's appearance" in the social space in the 17th century, through two phenomena: a) if before they were considered a subspecies, a category of "tiny animals", now children become "persons" and are loved as such by adults; b) if they were considered mini-adults, now they become individuals with specific needs. Therefore, children are defined, according to these studies, as people (like adults) with special needs (especially those of adults), as a "sector" of society, a group with its own interests in social evolution. They were researched either as a resource – as a valuable possession of adults, which contributes to the economic well-being of families and societies or as a medium or long-term investment of society – or as a burden and cost, especially for women (Badinter, 2012).

This ambiguity of the scientific attitude towards children and childhood does not remain without practical consequences. The 20th century is the time when Western European culture, seeking to delimit childhood, puts children "quarantined" in the world of adults (children deal with play and education, adults with work and economic responsibility). Previously separated, the two worlds can be compared. Children are seen as people who have not yet achieved full legal and economic status in society, people who are politically, intellectually, sexually or economically incapable. For this reason, contemporary researchers approach issues such as (Tesar, 2016):

1. the status of children nowadays as independent social actors, capable of decision-making and action in their own interests or
2. the children's rights (participation, partnership or protection).

Current studies on childhood enforce the construction of an "understanding" and "respect" of the child and childhood that changes significantly the relationship to them, just as feminism has changed significantly the relationship to women (Moran Ellis, 2010).

In addition to these studies, however, structuralist approaches remain relevant; in these investigations childhood is not only a framework for the manifestation of children, but an autonomous cultural structure. This "classical" perspective of anthropology was exemplified by Leo Frobenius (in 1921), in his theory of the ages of culture. The culture of childhood is dominated by intuition and animism. Frobenius calls it the "paideuma of childish demonism" (1985: 102), represented by almost unlimited creative capacities, fuelled by the belief in the unseen vital representations of the world and by the conception of continuity between the perceptual centre (which will later become the self and the interior universe of the adult person) and the concentric dispositions of reality.

Based on Frobenius' theory, Lucian Blaga (1944) also approached the subject of childhood. However, for Blaga, childhood can become, beyond age, a culturally prevailing state in which the structures of thinking and representation are childish and persistent for all ages. A culture of childhood is defined, therefore, by intuition, animism, and by the feeling of solidarity and continuity between self and the other, between nature and society, between man and God. The favourite environment for this culture is the village.

Methodology

The present study approaches childhood from a structuralist point of view, referring to the family, community and cultural frameworks of the traditional Romanian society. The main source of the information is the demographic, ethnographic and anthropological literature on this topic.

Until recently, Romanian society knew an extremely consistent childhood culture, especially in its predominant peasant dimension. After the Second World War, Romania still had more than three quarters of population peasants and, of this peasant population, almost a third were children up to 14 years old and only a tenth of the elderly were over 60 years old (Trebici, 1985). That is, a couple of grandparents had, on average, six grandchildren. The demographic profile also supported a socio-cultural profile in which childhood was very present. In fact, the imprint of childhood age in traditional Romanian cultural manifestations was so strong that Lucian Blaga made childhood the defining hallmark of Romanian popular culture: "Childish' is the village; it considers itself the 'centre of the world' and it lives within comic horizons, extending into myth" (1969: 267). The age of this culture is not given by the specific organic ages, but by what Blaga calls "the phenomenon of collective psychology of the 'adoptive ages'" (1969: 271); thus, culture is not the product of children directly, but of mature people who are still under the sign of childhood, that is, subordinate to a childish spiritual order.

The knowledge of childhood as a social structure cannot, therefore, ignore the knowledge of the village. The traditional and modern Romanian society is one dominated by popular culture. The village is the place of the intuitive manifestation of the person, the place of story and myth, of the direct connections and of the continuity, which are the main specific features of childhood. The ethnography of the child and the rural childhood is in fact the attempt to recover the knowledge of the genuine character of the childhood. In this type of community, people are not abstractions, but they are specific people with particular traits, and they are fundamentally distinguishable – the woman from the man, the young man from the old man or

the child from the adult. Not coincidentally, the specification of the most present social types is made by children: the woman without children is not a woman, the man without children is not a man; instead, the child without parents is an orphan, one of the most powerful types in mythical thought.

The frameworks and institutions for the social manifestation of the child are the family, the neighbourhood, the age group and the community, *i.e.* the entire social space, the natural world and the supernatural world. Family roles (of filiation or fraternity) are complemented by important social roles, such as that of practitioner of certain forms of worship or specific rites, which cannot be taken over by another social group and without which the community may be endangered. Specific activities combine specific social learning actions with lucrative (productive) or ordering (administrative) actions.

Results and discussions

The child played, worked and grew at once; never alone, always in the familiar world of the village. Play, work and story were the coordinates of childhood. The child did not shy away from death or birth, or from sickness or evil; and a child had even specific techniques of communication with those beyond or with the guardianship spirits of death and nature. A child could have known if the case, along with everyone else, hunger, in the dry years, and abundance, when God gave. And he worked, not beyond his powers, but within his powers, which he measured and rose through what Simion Mehedinți recommended (in 1919) as a favourite way of educating children – the school of work. Compared to children's direct experience with earth (considering its plasticity *par excellence* as the best stimulant of creative activity, both in its clay and life support hypostases), with plants, with animals, so vulnerable and so strong at the same time, the pupils imprisoned among the four straight walls of the classroom and in a strict schooling schedule, seated in dead furniture, are, according to Mehedinți, future crippled souls (2006: 160-172).

In the family, the child was the "fortune of the Romanian" (Zanne, 1897: 77). The family, like the village community, were in Romania formulas for organizing the way of life in the world, or for gathering the "world" between the thresholds of daily existence. The traditional man and especially the child (a traditional man *par excellence*) do not know the difference between family intimacy and public life; they relate directly and entirely to the world, understood at once as a gathering of people (society), a cosmic order, and a divine law. The family was the initial world, the smallest, that children learned first. It was related to mother and food, to house, to places in the courtyard and to alleyway, to brothers and sisters, to animals, to father and work, to living and departed relatives. The Romanian family keeps in it what we find also in the family of Greco-Roman antiquity: the place, that is, the household, with the land in the heart of the village, but also with the land in the estate; the house with its objects, useful and beautiful at the same time; animals of all kinds (birds, bees, ruminants, or working, dairy, guarding animals or only souls "around the house"); and people, children, and parents, but seldom only the spouses, (sadly) isolated in their couples, without offspring.

The child is expected in the family as a witness to the blessed state of the woman, who reveals her maternal essence and thus reaches the most important social status she can have; as a witness to the man's investiture, who becomes the head of the family and enters the continuity of the offspring, paying his debt to his ancestors; as a witness of the elderly parents, who renew their family status as "good parents" (the grandparents), as "big parents" (the grandmother and

the grandfather) or, in the same sense, "the elderly" (the *old* mother and the *old* father); as a witness of the house or nation in which he brings evidence of growth, fertility and abundance. The ritual richness of the gestures that accompany the child's expectation between wedding and pregnancy are a sign of the importance of the child for the family.

The entrance of the child into the family was welcome through the first great threshold of life – the birth. Romanian peasant customs related to birth have much in common with the customs of the other thresholds, namely, marriage and death. The wedding is celebrated by the symbolic passage of the former children to the state of parents; it is the ritual officiating of good conception, in conditions of maximum physical, material, social and religious security, so it has as its focus the mobilized energies through the conception of the child. Death, although it does not refer at all to the child or childhood, has an obvious and surprising ritualistic symmetry with birth: the same expectation of the moment of passage, the same bath through which the remains of an existence are removed in preparation for initiation into another existence, the same care for rites and the propitiatory teachings, the same feast at which the community gathers to celebrate the integration of the soul into the next world into which it has just entered (Ghinoiu, 1999). "Bringing a child into the world has always been felt by people as a miraculous and mysterious act; those directly involved in it (mother and foetus, alike) being invested with great powers and treated as such by the whole community. Subject to the rites of passage, birth, like death, is an effective passage from one "world" to another, from one state to another; the world from which the child comes and the one in which the dead went, always being noted negatively in relation to our world, the 'white' world, the world of 'longing'" (Constantinescu, 2000: 128).

The physical birth takes place, in the Romanian village, without much preparation: until recently, the birth could take place at home, in the garden, in the field, where the woman did her chores. Sometimes she happened to be alone, but most of the time the assistance was provided in advance by one of the most important figures of the family, the family or, more recently, the community – the midwife, the oldest woman in the father's family, who received the child in her lap (Constantinescu, 2000: 135). As in the family of classical European antiquity, physical birth meant nothing without symbolic birth: the child had to be greeted and served, not so much by the mother, but by the midwife, godmother or supernatural beings, such as the deities of destiny (*Ursitoarele*, the Romanian versions of the Moirai or the Fates, the Parcae). As a source of vitality and precious growth, the young child was also threatened by evil spirits (*Samca* or *Striga* in Romanian, *Strzyga* in Polish, *Stryha* in Belarusian) and the child was guarded with great strain against these by his protectors.

The period of the first ages of life is terribly full of norms, rituals and beliefs, because it is crucial for the life-long wellbeing of the child and, through him, for the good continuity of the nation (Gorovei, 2002). The birth is immediately followed by the first bath, an important rite of separation, but also an opportunity to influence, by those qualified (midwife, first of all) the physical and moral condition of the child (water, objects added to the bath, the time and place decided for the bathtub are rigorously fixed by tradition) (Marian, 1995: 57-80). The rites of integration follow, the worship of the hearth and the fire, the centre of energy and vitality of the household, when the child receives, also from the midwife, a generic name, sometimes unknown to the mother (Constantinescu, 2000: 129). A dangerous period is the one between this first (domestic) integration and the baptism (which is the integration in the extended community), the forty days in which the child is kept, even today, even in cities, away from any foreign eye, closed in the house. Baptism, the second threshold of separation from the "unlit" condition of the child (the one outside our world, the white world) and his integration into the community,

together with the hitherto guardians (the midwife, the parents) and godparents, with whom the connection will be as durable as a blood bond (Stahl, 1936; Cojocaru, 2008: 163). The godmother and the midwife are the two spiritual mothers of the child whose authority is sometimes stronger than that of the blood parents; it extends beyond childhood, beyond the marriage of the "godchild" and does not end until after his death: for as long as he lives, that person (she, the godmother – our note, C. P. B.) is accountable to God for the child. For the godmother is more important both as a father and as a mother and as all the kinship of the godson or goddaughter, who must obey her, for she bears the word of God. For, if the human being is left without a godmother, it's worse than when his mother has died; for, who pays for him in the pit?" (Stahl, 1998: 137).

In the family, the child not only redefines and enriches the area of kinship, but, as a newcomer from another world, restores the bonds between the living and the dead. The custom of naming the boy after the paternal grandfather, or the girl by the name of the maternal grandmother, resisted for quite some time against the right of godparents to give their name by baptism. In fact, the midwife, a central character with the role of performer of the ritual of birth and the cult of the deities of birth, is the oldest woman in the community, the closest to the elderly-dead of the new-born's community; the existence of this family status and of the cult that she officiated has already been attested in the Geto-Dacian populations (Cojocaru, 2008: 161-163). The etymological investigation of the term "midwife" (Vulcănescu, 1987: 213-214) highlighted several ideas:

1) the reference to a matriarchal family order, in which the cult of the dead and of the new-borns is the attribution of the elderly woman, and the old man does not represent an equivalent function, but he is the "midwife's husband";

2) the connection of form and content between the midwife and the estate (the land, the burial place of the elderly, *i.e.* the dead), which extends the ceremonial function of the midwife to a priestly one, officiating a Neolithic cult of the land and of the telluric deities of death and fertility (Bistriceanu Pantelimon, 2007: 77-80).

The great concern for the good receiving of the child is already an argument for considering him as the "Romanian's fortune". But this qualification also has an economic meaning, given that the child enters naturally into family life by working along with the other members. Although the child began to work from an early age, he worked not beyond his powers, but according to their power and ability; therefore, these powers became known to him and they developed through lucrative physical activity. Although modern thinking tends to condemn child labour as exploitation, research into definitions and ways of doing family work does not support this. In the village, work was an ontological and cultural fact and not an economic activity. Its purpose was not to gain, but to increase, a quality of less economic and more magical significance, which is aimed at most of the domestic concerns of men, and which contains in itself a wealth of economic, social, and religious meanings. A "prosperous" household is one in which people are cheerful and healthy, working together (but not to the same extent), young and old, with pleasure and benefit; a household where children are "crowded", cattle are fat and crops are plentiful. In the "no-increase" household, hard work is done, but in vain, the field does not bear fruit, the animals perish, people get sick and die. (Cristescu-Golopenția, 2002: 153-160). The magical-religious significance of a category that apparently has only economic connotations is due to a different definition of wealth: this is not only the result of individual effort, but the result of a good settlement in the world and in fate. Increase of wealth is not a positive amount, but a gift, which man can at most guard, but not "produce". He is not the

author of his wealth, but only the one who enjoys it. The integration of the child in this type of work has, therefore, very little in common with his "employment" in the meaning accepted in modern economics. Through work, the child enters the world and finds out what he can do in it. Through it, the child finds out how space and time are segmented and he learns the type of causality that integrates him into the universe (Bistriceanu Pantelimon, 2010).

This is the reason why, household work is also the best family education received by a child. According to the judgment of Simion Mehedinți, work is neither a shame, nor a trauma for children urged by their parents to work, but a pursuit of nature, of the given order of the world. Moreover, work is the natural continuation of the game, and children work, says Mehedinți, even when it seems to us that they are playing (when they imitate, with the clumsiness of age, the work of their parents), thus building a strong character. On the contrary, "the simulacrum of work, beginning with the falsity of certain Fröbelian games (true caricatures) and ending with the verbal teaching of secondary and even higher schools, is the surest path not only to ignorance, but also to lack of character. (...) So, in order not to go the wrong way, we must start at any age, as much as possible, from real work. This guide is the surest of all those that ethnography and ethnology have made available to pedagogy and morality" (Mehedinți, 2006: 48).

In the community, the child was meant to play: "If he is a child, let him play; if it is a horse, let it pull and if it is a priest, let it read", said the great Romanian storyteller Ion Creangă, in his memoirs in 1879. Like any other form of activity that requires the absolute dedication of the participants, play is also a form of return to archaic, primitive (in the sense of fundamental and primordial) formulas of manifestation. As adults, we are often amazed at the intensity with which children live playing (not the games themselves). And often, as citizens and public defenders of public peace, we are concerned about the violence mobilized by children through play. As a result, many of the old forms of playing are either virtualized (transferred to the area of the computer's virtual space) or replaced with games designed to create skills that adults find useful.

However, for the traditional Romanian community, play is the perfect formula for education outside the family and integration in the public space. This integration involves not only functional adaptation, or the creation of skills to operate with the objects of public space and to use the resources of this space in their own interest, but also the child's understanding of extra-family community forms and their adoption. Entering the playgroup means entering the age group. Later, after 7-8 years, from these unstructured groups, ritualized associations arise, in the form of carolling troops, for example) (Cojocaru, 2008: 413, 436), or, from unstructured groups may arise the primary ties of ritual communion (such as the "tying" of blood, or cross, brothers and sisters). The integration in these extra-familial community formulas was done either by passing some tests (of resistance, skill, discretion – in the case of group integration), or by the ritual exchange of vital substance, blood or by the ritual consumption of the same foods (Constantinescu, 2010: 140-141). These age groups with distinct organization and autonomy from the world of adults achieved an extremely strong type of socialization, through which children were connected not only in the continuity of generational descendants, but also in horizontal solidarity that would keep the community strongly connected and had to guarantee them a solid social integration.

Apart from these initiation rituals within clear age groups, which often retain an esoteric character, accessible only to the initiates, play is, in turn, a ritual whose spiritual charge is accessible to the child precisely through the demonic dimension of his thinking (Leo Frobenius, 1921/1985) or through child's metaphysical sensitivity, as Lucian Blaga called it (1944/1969).

Playing in the traditional community always follows a scenario that reproduces ancestral fragments or myths, which can be preserved as such or in forms of concentrated infantile magic that refer to the fundamental religious formulas of sacrifice, birth, death, etc. They include "the dialectic of life and death, of good and evil", as well as the meanings of the mythical Christian and pre-Christian confrontations and conclusions (Geană, 2017: 157-158).

The connection between childhood and death, before horrifying the thinking of adults as joining categories that today seem to be excluded, is the basis of a majority of traditional play scenarios. According to Ivan Evseev (1998), the counts in children's games contain the mythologeme (the mythological, universal, structural theme) of choice by drawing lots. Fate is called to designate, in mythical scenarios, a human sacrifice dedicated to a deity of nature (such as fairy-tale dragons, guardians of groundwater) or a messenger of the community to the deity (as was, in the Geto-Dacians, the most brave young man, the one who wins the brave games of measuring strength, alertness, courage). Ball, circle, or stone games once had cosmological functions and were assigned solar or lunar symbols.

The mythical representations of the ancestors are also present in the traditional games, to be recognized especially in the guise of masks (common in the processions that are formed during the winter or spring holidays) and in the vigil games. The dead of a family, even those who have not metamorphosed into ancestors, and especially girls and women, are present in the games with the *leuca* (the Romanian word for a piece of wood from the moving mechanism of the chariot, used in a game which is played on the night of Easter Saturday and Sunday in the cemetery, around a burning fire lit of the rotten or broken crosses), or the games of the *felegii* (an ancient type of adorned doily used to "bind" together either dance partners, or married couples), the game of the bands of *Surate* (sisters), of the girls from Lioara's or Lilioara's band. They take place as ritual dances, started on the graves in the cemetery by the girls and continued outside the cemetery, in the village, in the fields, on the roads, when other people are included. These are as described by Ion Ghinoiu (1997: 109): "According to the place and the meaning assigned to the magical acts, the ceremony consists of two parts: the division of the *Surate* into two unequal groups and their passage from one group to another, one by one, in the order specified by the text spoken or sung by participants in the form of dialogue, in order to restore balance by inviting the 'sisters' from the larger group addressed by the 'sisters' from the smaller group to choose 'little sisters'; the formation of pairs, representing the souls of the living accompanied by the dead, holding hands, or a wand, or a handkerchief, or a small doily and they would form a bridge, by raising the arms under which they pass allegorically, some pairs from life to death and from death to life, the other pairs".

Embodiments of death as such are also present in the games. Thus, for example, the game of chick-gaia (or, of hawk and pigeons) contains the mythical characters of death and life: *gaia*, the bird of death, whose claw cuts the thread of life comes and "steals" a chicken, a bird symbol of life and fertility (present in wedding rituals). Likewise, *Baba-oarba* (the Blind Hag, or, *now you see me, now you don't*), a game attested throughout the Romanian space, a game in which the main character – the embodiment of death – seeks to catch a victim that he adopts through contagion.

Even the cradle has multiple mythological meanings. It is the vehicle that accompanies the crossings of the great thresholds: birth (the new-born child is placed in the hollow in which the bread is kneaded, bathed and rocked to grow easily) and death (according to information provided by Ivan Evseev, the oldest coffins had in the form of a cradle or monoxylon boat, meant to carry the soul over the waters that separate the world here from the one beyond, and the

mourning cries speak of the "rocking one", in which the soul of the dead travels) (Evseev, 1998: 205; 221).

Children in the village community were not limited, locked in reserved places (as is the case in contemporary societies, for security reasons), but were always present in the world that was both theirs and that of adults, as well as it was a world of women, of men, of human beings and of God. Their social importance is also visible in the fact that they had their own cultic manifestations - of *Caloian* or *Paparuda*, Romanian names for the deities of the rain that had to be invoked in times of drought to save the fruit of the field – and these fulfilled a priestly role that only they knew and could play. One of the most common customs, part of meteorological magic practices, is *Caloian*. The *Caloian*, a doll made of children's clay (sometimes two tiny faces were made, "the father of the sun" and "the mummy of the rain"), was buried and after three days ritually unearthed and thrown into a well or on running water, to release the rains or, on the contrary, for their "binding" (to stop the floods). Ethnographic information says that the character is the embodiment of a child who disappeared in unknown conditions, probably drowned, sought and cried by his mother throughout the hearth and the village estate. Other research joins *Caloian* with mythological characters of antiquity (Adonis, Attis, Osiris, Sabazios, Dionysos, even Zalmoxis), or, with the main figures of Christianity (John the Baptist or John the Beautiful, Caloianis) (Cojocaru: 243; 340-341). Through ritual, *Caloian* is invested as a messenger of the community to the divinity of rain or sun. And *Paparuda* is a pluviometric goddess, also embodied by children, especially girls, little priestesses of this cult which requires the goodwill of the divinity to ward off drought. Similar cults were identified by Frazer in India (1890/1980), and Ovidiu Birlea (1981) considers that the poetic structure of the text and melody suggests an archaic prehistoric origin of the custom.

At other times, children's status was one of initiation into one of the most important roles of an unwritten community, that of witnesses. For this purpose, the best of the children were selected and ritually beaten when establishing the boundaries between the fields. Contemporary thinking is quick to condemn the beating of children in traditional societies, but it does not know – or it does not mention – the social importance and prestige that the beaten child will have in front of the community, when he will be the only one believed when he confesses about the state of borders in public cases of property regulation (Stahl, 2000).

The child was initiated into the mythical universe through fairy tales. The principle of public education in the great cultures of antiquity was based on the principle that mythology and sport have an essential role in the education of children. Myths were learned, in a first form, through the stories of mothers and nurses and, later, through their teaching in school. In the Romanian village, physical education was done through work, and mythological education through fairy tales.

If through play the child is initiated in the mythical scenario, through the story he learns the mythical spirit (Blaga, 1969: 290-308). The story conveys to the child a certain sense of reality: it includes not only the objects, phenomena, characters he sees, but also those he does not see. The world in which he lives is revealed to him as full of life, spirits, deities, demons, leprechauns: the forest is carolled by forest girls, fairies, the Wood-Bender or Mummy of the Forest, other fairies or fish-emperors live in the waters, in the air the *Iele* (the fairies of inspiration and/or madness) play, in the sky the Moon and the Sun fulfil their curse from the beginning of the world, the mountains bang their heads, the flowers are speaking and enchanting. Even the domestic universe can be, at some point, inhabited by fairy tales: the weakest horses can become mischievous if they eat embers, the dog can be a beautiful enchanted Prince

Charming, the ox, the sheep, the pig or the rooster can each be guides to the fantastic realm and the pots and pans can open the door to strange spirits. The world of the child in the countryside is, through the fairy tale, heterogenized – through the extraordinary diversity of the mythical, demonic or human owners who govern the segments of existence – and totally enlivened. On the contrary, the world of the child in the city is artificial, homogeneous and dead (Blaga, 1969: 265-266).

Unlike modern civilization, in which the age of childish demonism is strongly differentiated from that of mechanical maturity, and childhood tales are only a relic of the tired memory of parents, children of peasant culture are not upset by confrontation with adults: in turn, they cultivate the mythical spirit through the lyrical or religious developments of fairy tales. The beliefs, superstitions, religious representations of the parents complete and guide the orientation of the children in the fairy tale world. This orientation is essential to the most elaborate moral systems. Through stories, the absolute limits are established: of good and evil, in particular, but also of beauty and ugliness, of truth and falsehood. The nuances by which, in mature thinking (generalized at all ages in modern and contemporary times), these categories are relativized and become indistinguishable are foreign to the *paideuma* of childhood: children ask and get to know the precise boundaries that separate categories, through the story. The exclusivism of these categories is complete, so that the most explicit conflict between their representations cannot be avoided. Dragons will never make a pact with Prince Charming, nor will wolves with lambs or dragons and emperor's daughters. The role of violence is to potentiate the conflict and therefore the differentiation of the mythical categories, transferred, with the maturation, in moral categories. Death, a terrifying event, is not for childhood accompanied by a fairy tale but an expiatory or purifying event (when the dying person is a negative character) or a sacrifice, is a return of death to life (the death and resurrection of the Handsome Boy) (Candrea, 2001).

Fairy tales do not begin or end with their actual narration. As the excessive imagination of childhood takes over and expands the categories of the fantastic in the profane area, the fairy tale is organically continued in play, in myth, and later, in morality. Keeping children close to this mythical dimension of existence creates a much stronger (and infinitely superior) liaison as compared to what the new networks of urban, civilized sociality can offer: belonging to the family and social group, on one hand, and belonging to the transcendent community, on the other hand.

We can offer here, as an example, the dialogue among the children of his village reproduced by L. Blaga: "I was not more than about seven years old: We were about five boys, all about the same age; we stood in a circle, calm, in the middle of the alley, in the evenings. We do not know in what connection it happened that one threw around the question: "What will it be like when you are dead?" One of us answered without delay, as enlightened: 'Dead must be as if alive. That's how you don't even know you're dead. For example, we sit here in a circle and talk, but maybe we are dead, but we don't realize it' ... We recall very well that shivering feeling in front of the abyssal perspective opened by the answer of that boy. It was that earthquake, which you experienced as a child, as well as later, when you stepped around the last border" (Blaga, 1969: 266).

In any discussion of childhood, orphans or illegitimate children deserve a special reference. Normally, the children were raised by the small family, that is, by their parents and siblings. In the case of orphans, they were raised by large families, relatives, neighbours and, ultimately, communities. Most of the time, it was customary for a relative (the wealthiest or the

one who wanted them the most) to raise them until they could return to the affairs of their house; upon occasion, a woman who wanted children turn to her relatives. In addition to these concentric powers of the village, orphaned children took refuge (unlike orphans in urban areas) in their home and land, which did not disappear with the death of their parents. And, very important, they were in God's care (Majuru, 2006: 224-234). The same happened with the love children, born of mother-girls, who sinned without being married. They were believed to be especially loved by God or the Mother of God, as infants without earthly parents. Adopting illegitimate children or orphans was considered auspicious by families without children or whose children were dying: it was believed that after you adopted a child for your soul, God would also give you children of the body. It was a very grievous sin on the soul of the married woman or the wrong girl to hide or kill the child. The village could, wanted and knew how to keep all its children, orphaned or illegitimate, too. While the childless parents were condemned, and considered oppressed by a curse, children without parents were considered to bring luck and welfare.

In connection with these children, there is, in the Romanian folklore, a myth of the orphan (present especially in fairy tales) and another, equally puritanical, of the orphan's sacrifice. The sacrifice of the child was assimilated by Eliade to the interpretation of the legends of the building sacrifice (such as the legend of the Argeş Monastery) and was related to the previous sacrifice of the father (of the father, of the mother or of both). The sacrifice of the child cannot be fulfilled, for the sacrifice has no maximum value unless it is no longer someone's child, but the child of the whole world, whose appearance is necessarily linked to a mystery: "Important, in the world of myth, is the investment [of the child – our note, C. B.] with the attributes and destiny of the orphan, of the child par excellence, that is, of the primordial child, in his absolute and invulnerable cosmic loneliness, in his perfect uniqueness. The appearance of such a child coincides with a primordial moment: the creation of the Cosmos, the creation of a new world, of a new historical epoch (Virgil), a 'new life' at any level of the real" (Eliade, 1992: 171).

Conclusions

The Romanian village is a world of childhood. It was confirmed by ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists and everyone else who found that the village is the place of intuitive manifestation of the person, the place of story and myth, of direct connections and continuity. Children are, in the village, in their own world, the one populated with various supernatural and worldly characters in which they are not the only who believe - like some sort of a behavioural deviation that disappears with maturity - but the adults as well. Their game and their games, like the fairy tales told by the elders, connect them to the fundamental themes of the world: life and death, joy and pain, good and evil. Children were important in the traditional village, not only as a promise of maturity, but also as active members in the family, community and the supernatural universe. Beyond studying children, getting acquainted with this cultural experience (the *paideuma*) of childhood is not only a noble goal, but also a solution in our biological, our social and (why not?) our religious balance.

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