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An Analysis of Easter as a Method of Preserving Romanian Traditions

Bianca TEODORESCU¹

Abstract

This article is a study about how Easter traditions are perceived in our days, especially in the cities from Romania. The main purpose of this study is to reveal which are the aspirations of people regarding the phenomena of traditions and rituals in Romania and also to find their meaning in a world which is aimed to be more profane than sacred. For my research, I turned to some researching methods starting from meta-analysis method as questionnaires and participative observation. In order to maintain its culture, Romanian people has to fight against the secularization of the society. Today, Romania's counties seek to reform their traditions, to draw people back to their roots in hope to preserve the traditional celebrations in the present society. During the preparation for Easter, a series of emotions begin to act in order to create traditional rituals. These emotions are responsible to preserve the Romanian traditions. I focused this study on how people are participating in the Easter rituals in the present and how they feel by visiting places of childhood or places in the country where the tradition has remained as the most important part of the traditional village. However, in the country, Easter celebration is contributing to preserve the Romanian traditions more than others traditional Romanian celebrations.

Keywords: *anthropology, Easter, celebration, rituals, tradition.*

1. Introduction

In my opinion, the urban environment is less bent on religious rituals, and an important celebration as Easter help the people who live in the cities to return to their traditions. However, in the last year, I observed

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an opening of people to traditional Romanians customs. People had become more receptive regarding to the religion. Easter bring outside the Romanian traditions, seeking to form new states, imposing a real perception of people. Because of that, I tried to see if young people understand the significance of Easter and how their actions are changed in the period of the feast. Easter has a sacred meaning for Romanian people from the religious point of view. However, even if the entire society is participating in the Easter rituals, the media is borrowing different cultural elements from other cultures. This action has a bad influence on Romanian society and it separates them from their origins and traditions. Without traditions, Romanian will lose his significance. I wanted to find out if young people protect their traditions and how they are felt in the period of Easter feast. Traditions are important for every part of Romania's regions. Our generation is responsible to give to the next generation the necessary information about Romanian origin and to support the religious rituals. Even if people live in cities or villages, they are a part of the society and how they way they react in the period of celebration, they affect the future. Thus, Romania has to understand and to respect its culture and tradition in order for them to live.

Close to the Easter period, Romania is visited by a lot of foreigner who are attracted by the traditional Easter rituals, especially by those from the rural areas. Thus, during the Easter, the traditional village becomes the centre of the ritual and myth creation which are specific to the Romanian people. Through these rituals, the Romanians identify themselves with their ancestors, but, at the same time, they manage to transmit the customs to next generations. Easter rituals need to be understood by both the Romanians and the foreigners.

2. Problem Statement

Ernest Bernea talked in his book „Space, time, causality to the Romanian people” that: Time is the foundation of the ritual act. Committing such an act, the Romanian peasant has to notice the course of time and that it is requesting after the qualities of the moments, certain acts. The peasant knows that only if he respects the time, this ritual act will gain a sense, fulfilling its true meaning. The Romanian peasant respects what we called the condition of time. There is a real battle for people in the cities to get to know their traditions and to receive the proper information about it. E. Bernea [1] believes that a man can't live alone; his personal time is fitting in a social time and has a common destiny. In this way, a man's faith is directly bound by a social group, of a nation if in the case of an exceptional person

this condition is related to ethnic coordinates where the community's meaning of life imposes itself with a lot of strength on the traditional customs as they are presented in some villages of the mountains. Through what he says, E. Bernea [2] provides some information about the time concept of the people from a certain society.

People have a need to remind themselves that Romanian traditions must survive over the power of marketing which is in our case, a symbol of other cultures. They want to regain the Romanian traditions from the villages, the place where the rituals are preserved and consider sacred. Mihai Pop considers that: in traditional communities, the customs give an own rhythm of life. Their observance, their practice imposes a certain cadence on the collective life, the family and in general in the social life of the village. In the period of the farms work, they chose to have an equilibrium between work and relaxation through the steps in which it marked the end of some chorused and the starting of others. Our society needs a balance between profane and sacred. The modern world is in a continuous change and it needs to protect what it's old and what it's traditional in order for the society to succeed [3].

3. Methodology

For this study, I used the questionnaire as a research method on a group of 120 people, 70 women and 50 men, with the age between 20 and 35, most of them being from academic environment. Within this questionnaire, the participants answered voluntarily; my purpose was to understand the people's perception on the Easter preparations in today's society and how they identify themselves with the rituals of this period.

I applied a questionnaire in order to make a list with the most important rituals in the period of Easter. This questionnaire was realized on a group of students, the majority were born and lived in the villages from Oltenia. I found a great difference in student's perception over traditional celebrations from Romania; students find themselves more leant towards tradition and appreciate all the Easter rituals. Observed that the majority who responded in questionnaire chose painting the eggs as main ritual in preparing for Easter. This ritual has its origin, even since the time of Jesus Christ. Nowadays, Romania is maintaining the tradition alive through its willingness to teach children about its importance. All Romanians respects this custom considered to be essential in celebrating Easter. The Eggs represent a rite of passage in which Christians assign a special time just for it. The passing of people from their daily routine for a festive time is centred

on a symbolic rite, the eggs are the principal reason in inducing people to a more sacred world than a profane. One. The period of preparing Easter has become more aware in the people's minds as painting the eggs begins. In this period, people do not see the eggs just a simple food; the eggs have now a sacred value given by church and tradition. The eggs are painted especially in red which is the representative colour for Easter and it's the symbol of this celebration. The traditions say that red is represent the colour of Jesus Christ's blood. During this period, Romania becomes more aware of the sacred power that eggs have and they accept them as the next step for the big moment: Jesus Christ's Revive. The Easter celebration is followed by people under strictly ritual where they chose to give a special value. [4]

For my research, the questionnaire was applied to the students from second and third year of several faculties of University of Craiova. After their responses, I could observe that people, in the majority of the cases, they chose to spend the Easter with their families, and less with their friends. Easter is valued in two forms: commercial and traditional. Our society keeps both forms in celebrating the Easter and we can see in many commercials the image of Jesus Christ and the image of an Easter bunny. It creates a mix between these two forms in celebrating Easter.

I reported a question from my questionnaire refers to the significance the students give to Easter. Even if they celebrate Easter with their families or with their friends, they are put in a situation where they have to pass through a rite of passage. Thus, I could see from their responses that they chose family over friends and in this case, the path to their home is in fact a symbol of passing, of preparing for a new phase. The path they are passing until their family is one overload with emotions and symbols. In this passage, they remind themselves about their childhood and Easter becomes a true traditional celebration in their perception. When they arrive at their families, the students are prepared to enter into a new world, into a magical one, where the past is coming back as a present. Here they take part in the Romanian rituals. The majority responded that the first ritual they take part in is the painting the eggs. Painting the eggs is the symbol of the Easter, and every Romanian who celebrates Easter is doing this ritual. Everything goes around the food. Even the feast is not finished yet, people make different traditional food as: pască, cozonac, drob de miel, and others². Cooking traditional food is

² Cozonac is a traditional Romanian sweet leavened bread and it is prepared for Easter and other traditional Romanian celebrations

Pască is a traditional cozonac which is made of leavened dill filled with sweet cheese and raisings and it is prepared for Easter in Romania

Drob de miel is a traditional Romanian dish, being one of the lamb dishes specific to the Easter

a special ritual for Easter. But the fact that the traditional food can't be eaten until the Revive of Jesus Christ is very interesting.

Questionnaire:

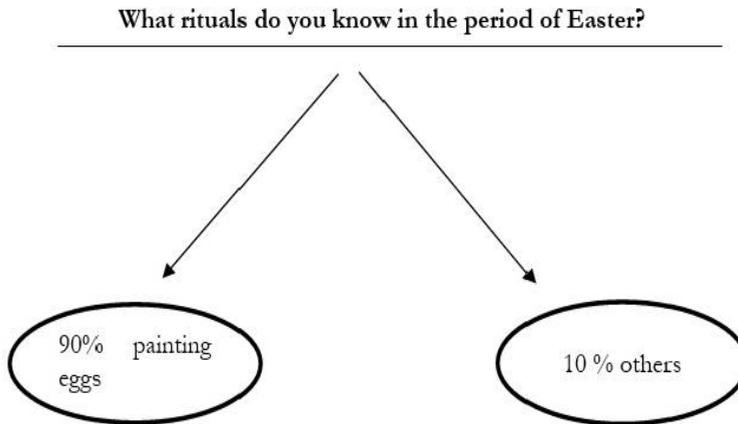


Figure 1

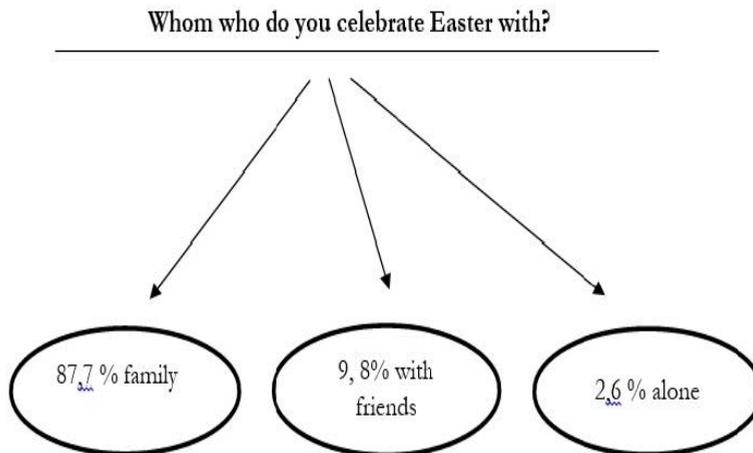


Figure 2

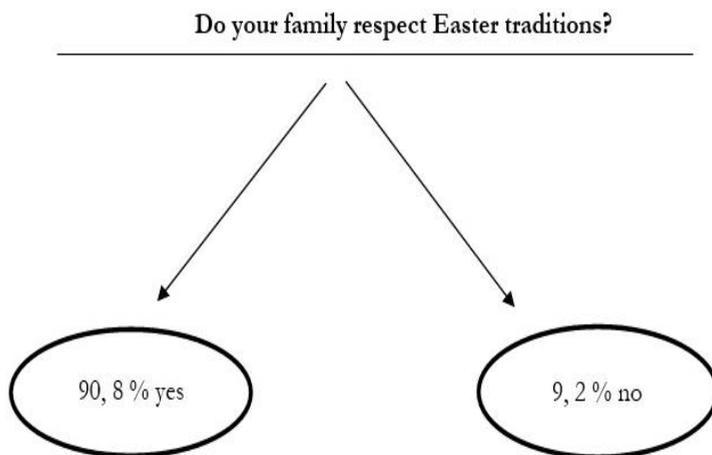


Figure 3

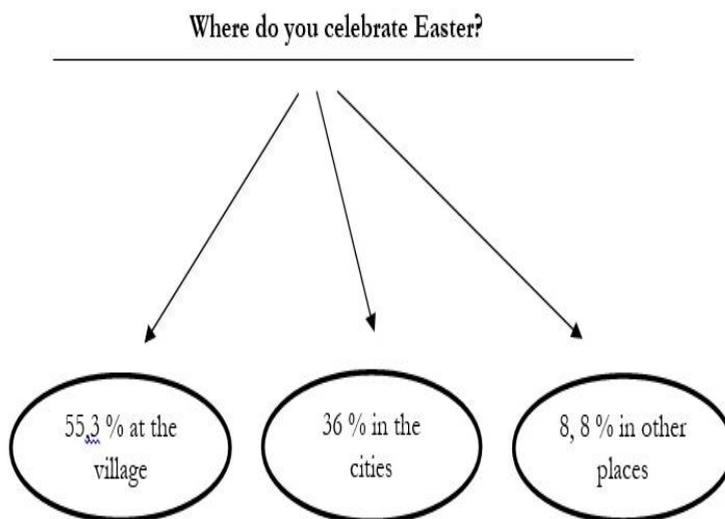


Figure 4

4. The Image of Easter rituals in Romanian society

Customs were born in the villages and were sent from generation to generation until nowadays. Traditional village combined moral and religious values in order to show the sacred symbolism of Easter. Sent from generation to generation, the Romanian from nowadays is more distanced from the moral principle that the Romanian peasant had in the past. This breaks from religion proved that people prefer to adapt to new elements of other cultures

than to keep their own. However, this break didn't sacrifice all the Romanian values. By the time the Easter is approaching, people are start searching for their old values which are a part of the societies 'rituals'. Thus, traditions start to have more power through the need of people to appreciate them at their own value. In this period, even the people who are not considered religious, begin to understand the need of religion in our society in order to recover its traditions. [5] Restoration of this bonding is applied on the reunion of the families in the traditional environment, in many times in a village that is far away from the modern world. The village is known not only from the books, it has to be discovered by going there and by acting like the people from there.

The village, through the Jesus Christ's Revive, becomes the central of traditions. Romanians look at the village as the place where the traditions are born. At there, they are feeling closer to their ancestors, with traditions and moral and social values. Every Romanian has to recognize the place of traditions' birth and to imply in the perception of Romanians in order for them to choose to separate from all what they know. A simple Romanian becomes more bound to the places where he has grown up, at the villages where his grandparents lived. At Easter, every family is reunited at the villages and are trying to teach their children the importance of finding the true Romanian traditions in places like these.

The cities seem to be a profane world with religious values given by the church. During this time, religion gains special valences, being able to create the sacred value of the Easter celebration. [6] The moral values of traditional village can be observed more in the period of preparation when the city becomes responsible of brining the traditions back in the centre of attention. This means that people who live in the cities seek to discover traditions in a middle of a society which is strongly attached to what it's profane and commercial. As the city becomes more entrenched in profane space, the Romanian traditions are harder to be evoked, many Romanians not knowing their true meaning. Calling the people to churches in order participate in the religious Easter rituals is just the urge of the priest to verify the true meaning of this celebration: to bring people closer to religion and to learn them about the importance of traditions. A reunion of the modern Romanian with the peasantry from the traditional villages is one of the most important steps in preparing all the society for the Easter celebration.

5. Returning to traditions

In the period of the Easter celebrations, people begin to ask questions about their origin, about a mythic time whose values were born a

long time before our society. Present society in the period of Easter tries to find out the magical time, time which is different from what it was known before and closer to what we can see at the traditional villages. Romanians put their reality aside, choosing a new space where they can be seen participating in rituals such as going to church, holding feasts, and cooking traditional food. Regardless of the time in which we live in, the Easter period bring us closer to myth and magic. Everything is profane and real, entering into a dark space, but magic and myth are the ones who are responsible to create a new form of surviving in a society full of symbols [7, 8].

Then returning to traditions through mass media becomes possible as people are more and more aware of their own origin. The Romanian traditions appear from every part of old stories about the life of old villages, about how people lived back then and about how strong their belief was. We know that even in our time, the peasantry has not the same beliefs as their ancestors had, but they remain closer to traditions than the people who live in the cities. Traditions stand in everyone's knowledge and depends only on us to preserve it [9]. The village nowadays is no longer full of symbols, but the Romanian rituals can be seen on every celebration [10, 11, 12]. During of preparing for the Easter, the city is dressed on the Easter symbols which can be analysed from a commercial or traditional point of view [13].

6. Conclusions

In the questionnaire that I applied to the students, I observed that their attention was directed more on food; they knew a lot about the importance of eggs and other traditional food and, also, they believed that without these, Easter can't be celebrated. The students understood the meaning of Easter from the religious point of view and considered that it is necessary to respect the traditions and preparing the special meal for the celebration. The entire mechanism of Romanians traditions is facing a long battle. The cultural elements from other countries can be seen in the preparation of Romanians for Easter and it's only up to people to understand that without Romanians rituals, the society will get lost. Although traditionalism feels lost during the rest of the year, during Easter, many Romanians choose to celebrate as they learn from their past. Traditionalism revives like Jesus Christ. The Romanian society needs to know the symbolism of traditional villages and its recognition.

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