

**RE-ENCHANTED NATURE.
Folk Religious Ethics Related to Natural Environment in Rural
Romania**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore in a common framework micro-spaces of secular life and macro-spaces of natural environment, both categories sharing a transcendental significance in Romanian folk religious Orthodoxy. The natural space on which this research focuses is the water source, seen as an ancient location of collective sacrifices and offerings, seasonal rituals and social gatherings. Given this sacred identity of rural wells and streams, rituals performed here were considered as a necessary contribution to general welfare of traditional communities, from the first centuries of our era. The Romanian situation offers a particular development due to the communist atheism which prohibited public celebration. The revival of expressed vernacular religiosity and its re-enchanted nature will be considered in connection of economic changes suffered by Romanian villages. On a more general view, the current research tries to verify ideas about secularization and lasting ritualism in an eastern conservative Christian area, and also to explain the lack of ecological concerns expressed by this population of agriculture-working peasants, despite their growing interest to the divine harmony of their environment.

Keywords: folk religion, nature, supernatural, human ecology, communist atheism, sacred water, traditional holiday.

After the fall of communism, time during which atheist propaganda prohibited celebrating important Orthodox holidays in public spaces, rural communities have readopted the old social custom. Religious people or less religious ones take part in rural processions and group gatherings, headed by the parish priest. The symbolic significance of the natural landscape, temporarily converted into ritual space, could be evaluated in terms of Romanian archaic imagery and a diachronic view on seasonal ceremonies, fertility cult, and healing techniques still attested in traditional rural societies of our time. However secularization may have affected the original shape and meaning, the secular features of rituals performed in natural landscapes tend to be assumed as recreational or leisure purposes. The public religious celebrations reinsure a secular form of a

communitarian ethos, a public consciousness that has generally survived the many destabilization means performed by the communists. Therefore, our research takes into account a historical perspective on how rural people have perceived public and assumed forms of religiosity that were related to nature.

An important issue of our approach is the fact that this kind of social rituals are pertaining to a syncretistic system of folk or vernacular religiosity. The control of religion on a more national, global level held by the political administration has also manifested as coherent struggle to decrease public participation on religious services, doubled by the intention of providing secular alternatives to the traditional religious spheres, like cultural manifestations or even political gatherings. Nonetheless, while the religious dimension of public rituals was discouraged, the folk frame was contrarily accepted and promoted by the government because the folkloristic heritage pertained to the issues of nationalism which made a relevant point on the communists' agenda.

For the archaic mentality, supernatural dangers threatening the natural order are still dominating the Romanian social imagery because they have not been totally repressed by religious ideas or scientific claims. Ecological uncertainty and big economical challenges could be addressed as some specific reasons of the Romanian religious conservatism, as contemporary sociologists of religion indicate. The religious conservative villagers perceive the abnormality in environmental conditions rather as a cause of religion and morality degradation, and not in scientific terms, as geophysical decay or technological transformations. This teleological situation about the imminence of the world's decay or world's end is a spread view with traditional religious people, from Christians' apocalyptic scenarios to Kali Yuga's visions of the Hindus.

Despite the close relationship of rural people to natural environment, they are not concerned on ecological policies and do not manifest a secular eco-friendly attitude towards nature. Thereby, natural places were also practical and social spaces that were not seen by atheist propaganda as having religious meaning. Being functional landmarks by their specific purposes in providing domestic necessities, they were less relevant to scientific ecology or their belonging to national cultural heritage.

The current research is based on ethnographical fieldwork data¹ and on the anthropological theories of sacred landscapes. The spatial pattern will further be explained in terms of ancient topography and Christian sacred spatiality.

Folk religion is a social phenomenon with strong regional diversity and is also dependent on local conditions of a certain community of practice, as has stated a historian who approached the problem of vernacular religiosity: "Within the human context, manifold factors influence the individual believer, such as physical and psychological predispositions, the natural environment (...) as well as political and economic conditions" (Primiano 1995, 44). From a more analytical point of view, traditional religiosity is understood in a close connection with human ecology, because it is acknowledged as "part and parcel of the general *social order*, rather an environmental condition instead of personal commitment, rooted mostly in tradition-preserving village groups of older, less educated woman and to a lesser extent in the conservative, older upper strata" (Tomka 2010, 8).

The relation of ritual and environment was consistently pondered by scholars of archaic religions. They named this connection "the ritualization of the environment" (Gotlieb 2006, 268), a nature-based reverence, an action of man's integration in his traditional environment. The practical reason behind ritual was often denied by some anthropologists, but other specialists, like Roy Rappaport considered that "religious actions had and still have not just sociological and psychological functions, but practical results too. As a prove for this opinion, he described how ritual cycles of New Guinea tribes played an important part in regulating the relationship of these groups with both the nonhuman components of their immediate environments and the human components of their less immediate environments" (1967, 17).

Studying primitive worldviews in their connection with ritual pollution, Mary Douglas emphasize that traditional communities couldn't permit themselves to have aesthetic, contemplative or speculative considerations

¹ The ethnographical information presented in this paper and describing Romanian rural communities are coming from personal fieldwork in two Romanian regions, Moldova and Oltenia, which are situated in northeastern and, respectively, southwestern Romania. The results of this research belong to an ongoing postdoctoral project, "The Folk Religious Dimension of the Romanian Water Rites. A Socio-Anthropological View" (2011-2013).

towards nature, but they have to reach their social practical ends by “all kinds of beliefs in the omniscience and omnipotence of the environment” (1966, 92).

This local particularity influenced the religious behavior in certain areas to the degree of encouraging even environmental concerns and inspiring ecological activism. It is the case Pacific Northwest coast Native Americans, who understand salmon both as the center of their mythic world and a primary food source. This interesting connection of logical action and religious expression highlights the environmental philosophy of *place*, seen as the result of “human culture’s peculiar and fascinating interpenetration with all the vagaries of topography, climate, and evolving ecology that define landscapes” (Flores 1999, 44).

Another relevant example is the perfect correspondence between scientific environmental approach and the mystical attachment of a certain people to its holly land; this is the case of a traditional Siberian population located near Altai Mountains and Ob River. Here, “the same regions are considered by the Altaian people to be special or sacred and are recognized by Western scientists as having great value for conservation” (Klubnikin et al. 2000, 1296). In addition, the modern Russian people in this area are still performing traditional ceremonies honoring the great river and practicing what the researchers called “traditional ecological knowledge in their management of the land and water resources” (ibid.).

Nature as divine agency

Socio-anthropological theories of the religion-space relationship have generally underlined the religious community tendency of creating and sustaining legends and pilgrimage to holly sites as living landmarks of a sacred history. Besides the distant travels that high religions require to their believers, there are also religious practices emphasizing the sacredness of more familiar places charged with spiritual meanings, a sort of local correspondents of highlighted biblical places in the Middle East. The category of “domestic pilgrimage” is opposed to exotic journeys to major shrines, based on a socially accepted continuity of every day religious activities (Coleman and Eade 2004, 8).

Within Western world, globalizing capitalism has deeply changed agriculture and local economy, grew the world urban space, the need of energy and resources and human ecologists even begin wondering how

can these changes be both intelligible and acceptable for Christian traditional communities. An account of the relationship between ecology and religion reveals the problem to be solved by theologians beginning with acknowledging the religion responsibility on ignoring the ecological crisis for centuries, because theology has provided a view on religion much more as anthropocentric than nature-centered perspective (Gotlieb 2006, 6). The Christian official interpretation of nature as one of the God's greatest creations, and therefore situated under His power, encouraged the traditional attitude of believers to be more afraid of supernatural challenges than by logical threatens. Interpreting the important shift from the pre-Christian animistic religion to Christian view on nature, anthropologists emphasized that the animistic theories of nature worship promulgated by exotic and ancient civilization were giving more attention to the proper state of their environment than the Christendom did.

Addressing the specific problem of how human perspectives on nature changed with the process of Christianization, experts on ecological history explained that there were in fact two influential ideological and philosophical elements which affected deeply how people ought to live in their familiar nature. A very important change was the Western early modern science that created a new vision of a passive, soulless nature, so distinct from the vital environment animated by wandering spirits of animistic religion (Peterson 2001, 45). The second element was the Christian medieval actions of destroying pagan animism, an action that was even considered a cause of our ecological global crisis. A secondary result of underlining God's potency over nature and mankind was that humans started to "exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (White Jr. 1967, 1205).

Even though the Christian worldview did not encouraged the deification of Nature, as a target of human's reverence, its anti-natural philosophy wasn't the only way to envisage the believers interaction with their natural habit. There are scholars of the Roman Catholic tradition which suggested that firmly dualistic paradigm that separates nature, humankind, and the divine could sometimes be just one of the possible directions in the rich series of nature-related discourses of the Western Church. This relativity opens between the rigid negation of a spiritual nature specific for the classical Roman Catholic tradition from the time of the early Church until eighteen century, and indigenous views on nature in non-western traditional

societies, that assume a conception of nature as a realm of supernatural (Binde 2001, 16).

As a matter of fact, the framework that generated the approach of a more pantheistic attitude within the official Christianity was that of folk religious ideas tolerated by ecclesiastical administration. One of the most striking examples is the cult of saints which generated shrines and cultic places situated in wilderness, near mountaintops, shrines or forests. This "geopiety" - a concept created by Linda Graber to underline the development of a spiritually oriented wilderness ethic with both personal behavior and political action (1976) - could be pondered as an example of a less orthodox cooperation between Christian and pre-Christian attitudes towards nature.

Therefore, the goals of our paper are to answer to several questions that emerged in the connection of folk religiosity and human ecology (Bennett, 1993). Is there a common practical goal of preserving the natural environment which could be relevant both for environmental secular policy and traditional institutions as the Church and the folk rural society? Is this natural world related to the otherworldly goals of Christian people or traditional people are just interested in preserving this-world's benefits?

An example of *domestication* of the biblical places, a process of adaptation of the official sacredness postulated by Sacred History in local sacredness is the water place. As human-centered natural places, water sources acquire vital resources and advocate the pragmatic ties between man and his environment. Also, we have chosen to describe water places as valuable example of rural people behavior towards nature because this environmental item reflects old magical and religious customs from early civilizations to Christian conversion by the emergence of waters biblical symbolism. From another point of view, rural wells and small running waters are a frequent element of Romania's geographical configuration. In conclusion, the essence of water place will be approached as a "heterogeneous place" - in the understanding of De Certeau - or a "herotopia", as Foucault named the places which enclose different times, forms or actions.

Local histories of sacred waters

We are going to privilege here the rural perspective on water places and the religious ceremonies carried out in the rural environment not because

in urban areas, specific services aren't sometimes performed near water places but because according to the most ancient ethnographical accounts that Romanian folklore archives dispose, for rural people worshipping water is a phenomenon closely related to the agricultural occupational profile of the traditional Romanians.

Discussing the primitive nature religion of the modern Greeks seen as an essential feature of their folk religion, Martin P. Nilsson underlines that "we must start from the agricultural and pastoral life of the countryside, which was neither very advanced, nor very primitive culturally" (Nilsson 1940, 5). As they wanted to have enough food, crops, grass for the animals, or fruits, the rural Greeks were admitting their dependence on enough rain or cool weather, searching for meteorological signs which could have indicated a good balance of the environmental conditions. In pre-Christian times, the supernatural provider of this climatic normality was *Zeus Lykaios*, the great weather god which had his sacred settlements on the mountaintops, places where people erected holly shrines and where their sacred processions ended in times of drought.

As their Greek correspondents, Romanian folk believers who live and work in an agricultural environment, logically perceive the cycle of water as a relation between rainfall and land fertility, between celestial and earthly waters. Nonetheless Romanian civilization did not attain the mythological specialization of the Greek culture (with its *nymphae* placed near certain water areas, or the idea sustained by historians and archeologist that every spring in Greece and Rome were presumably sacred), a historical fact that determined a less specialized folk pantheon until modern times. This lack of diversity may offer a possible explanation for the close connection between Romanian peasants and the earthly waters, seen as local embodiments of a higher sacred order, lower expressions that still provide holiness and numinous energies.

Trying to go beyond the dominant trend of considering holly energies as uncommon and totally separated from the common life activities, Ake Hultkrantz believes that "phenomena that look perfectly natural may intrinsically and by their origin be supernatural. Or processes that appear natural are really supernatural" (1983, 239). Thus, the continual existence of waters in specific sources could be considered by mystic people as a God's gift. Hence, the rainfall is not perceived in certain intervals of folk calendar as a normal evolution of natural cycle, but an expression of God's answer

to ritual procession and devotional prayers. The involvement of folk religious philosophy is increasing the gap between cosmological transcendence and worldly immanence. Although not modern folk religion was the framework which consecrated the supernatural feature of earthly powers. Peter Brown finds these traces as early as the late Antiquity: "The 'earthly' region, therefore, was never neutral. Men had to make up their minds about bearers of 'heavenly' power in an environment heavy with alternative, if invisible, 'earthly' sources of power" (1993, 18).

The classic dichotomy between sacred and profane in Durkheimian terms and in anthropologists' insight is not appropriate for describing the thin line separating the sacredness of water places and the practical use of the same. Romanian peasants tend to obliterate, in religious performance and magical acts, the philosophical idea of a substantially different, mysterious world. On the contrary, a generally accepted connection between the world of transcendental entities and the world of daily experience is well proven by the coexistence of empirical and religious activities in the same socially approved spaces.

Romanian rural people developed more ideas about ritual than empirical pollution. The pollution of a village water fountain was believed to be caused by angry or jealous peers or by accidents. Therefore, taking into consideration the answers to ethnographical questionnaires, we could acknowledge that ritual and empirical pollution became so interrelated that habitual remedies were both ritual and empirical. The ritual purification was provided by the local priest performing the service and prayers similar to those particular to the inauguration of wells. In order to regain the purity of waters, the owner of the fountain provides a general cleaning of the water device also by removing the mud, the objects and the dead animals found sometimes at the bottom. These objects are precisely what polluted wells and in pagan ancient point of view these were believed as a mean of preserving ritual qualities of a well. When we address ritual purity and impurity, we have to understand that "religious pollution is not a matter of environmental health. To pollute a well, you must dishonor it: you fill it in, or find a dead cat or dog to throw into it" (Dowden 2000, 46).

This pollution caused by so different types of sacrifices, from human ones to food, coins or clothes' fragments in more recent times and less cruel times were discussed also in the Romanian ethnology. The problem of ancient human sacrifice offered to a sacred well was addressed by an

important Romanian ethnologist who considered the recurrent local stories about unlucky episodes of a child drown by mistake in a village well as being the revised tamed variant of an intentional original human sacrifice (Eretescu 2007, 20). A similar theory was developed by Frazer and other anthropologists of natural religion on the manner the savages used to sacrifice vegetation spirits embodied by certain animals.

As special locations which offer healing, water places are not understood as areas mainly providing a spiritualized hygiene, a mystic purification due to the inner holly structure properties of the particular liquid. Water has been perceived as comprehensive cure and believed to heal every affliction and this was generally conserved by the Christian system of water symbolism mainly because the living water of Christendom firstly provided healing of the soul and then, by soul purification, a remedy for the flesh.

From scientific point of view, it has been revealed that, in some healing sacred sources, the living water contained hydrogen peroxide levels higher than normal water and this special water successfully cured some serious ailments. The first pre-scientific accounts of ancient times also acknowledged particular medicinal qualities of certain springs. The curative properties of famous wells were probably current in ancient times even in Romanian territories – as archaeological findings show by discoveries of artefacts and shrines close to fountains or rivers –, but in modern times every fountain has the virtual sacredness marked with a cross and with icons placed near it.

Within Romanian regions with important mineral and thermal water springs, the decreasing of water sacredness is caused by the transformation of this natural resource from folk medical landmarks into tourist and official medical resorts. On this counter movement of demystifying magic by scientific means, we shall however oppose folk beliefs about water in other Romanian regions, with no mineral resources and with high agricultural activity which required rainfall water, as well as digging for groundwater.

Romanian water places became Christian sites by means of a process that was more implicit and indirect than it happened in other important European Christian areas, and here we are referring mostly to Western Roman Catholic population. The veneration of wells was almost a general phenomenon of pagan Europe and therefore its spread was then took over

by ecclesiastical apparatus that managed to integrate it in Christian world-view and ritual performance. The accommodation of water rites within the new religious paradigm was realized by providing Christian identities to these water places. On the shores of big rivers where pagan people gathered to offer sacrifices Christians built famous churches. Information about the Church strategy is offered by the synod documents, writings of fathers, preaches of important bishops (Hubert, 1967; Audin, 1980). David Harvey suggests that the important presence of the Church in postmodern society “has been won in part through the successful creation, protection and nurturing of symbolic places” (Harvey 1993, 23).

Sacred wells situated in wild nature became landmarks of a well-known pilgrimage network. They used to acquire the numinous condition by the aid of medieval hagiographies and legendary effigies of saints. Analyzing the elements of European paganism, K. Dowden tried to understand what is it that makes the sacredness of a primeval, inhabited landscape, or “how is a holly place to be recognized?”. He identifies some means of this transformation, like a special event that precisely occurs there (“a lightning strikes, a meteor falls, a significant person dies”), but more frequently “landscape itself quietly dictates observance and it is the function of myth and oral tradition to devise the event that imbued this place with its special significance”, and in conclusion “sacred place is one recognition, and registration of anomaly” (2000, 28).

In the first centuries of our era, within Western Christian world, the specificity of waters holiness has been transformed, in *tempora Christiana*, by being officially assigned to certain water saints (Hope, 1893; Masani, 1918) like Saint Bridget in Ireland, Saint John Nepomucene in Bohemia, Saint Martin in France. Even in the writings of Saint Gregory of Tours, we find legends about what this process of assigning sacred identity to an expagan well actually meant. The great Gaul bishop tells about how did a well in Brioude become sacred after the decapitation of Saint Julian near it, transferring from that moment on his holly energy to the water flowing from this source and therefore to travellers and pilgrims that drank it or washed with it (Hubert 1967, 568). This is a relevant example of a mysterious event that assigns Christian identity to a water place, an example of an anomaly in Dowden’s terms.

Yet, applying these principles of recognizing sacred water to Romanian rural realities, peasants’ wells and small streams don’t seem to be wonder places, creating miraculous healing and representing pilgrimage sites.

Romanian Orthodox calendar authorizes two important celebrations of sacred water. By rituals that are performed and the biblical narrative that reveals its sacred meaning, the first one is the winter holiday of water, which is Epiphany, followed by the day of celebrating Saint John the Baptist. It is the moment when the priests are performing the great blessing of waters, a performance which requires an outdoor service, be it near running water, a village well, or in front of different liquid containers brought in the yard of the church.

Vital versus dangerous waters

Every early civilization required basic food and water to be able to settle in a certain place. Beside the need to create agricultural fields by deforesting the area, finding water was particularly important when a nomadic group of peasants were deciding to create a new village. The first villagers were searching for a nearby stream; they used to consolidate it or just dig the ground for creating a well. Nevertheless, for a superstitious point of view, to dig a well resembled as an act of sacrilege, with starting to work a wild land, by destroying the precedent vegetation or the dark forest. In addition, wells are an artificially manmade settling in the place was there is a spring that “differs sharply from the natural miracle of the unbidden spring” (Dowden 2000, 40).

In the long process of settling the new locality, that water source remained the vital and social center of the village, before people afforded to build private wells in their yard.

The central well became a *practiced place* or even a cultural place activated again and again by people’s trajectories, actions and rituals. The social identity of the shared well was encouraged by the specific shape of compact and nucleated villages which represented the basic human establishment of the Romanian hills and plains. Within the same village center, villagers disposed other social institutions, like the church, the community center, the Sunday dance field. The same configuration can be found in other European civilization starting with Early Middle Ages. England’s traditional villages also used to have two main features: “a well (usually now covered by a small stone building and disused) which represents the primeval water-supply without which the community could not have come into being at all and the church, which stands on the green, but no other buildings was allowed” (Hoskins 1955, 61).

Addressing the magical configuration of Romanian rural territory, the social anthropologist Paul H. Stahl underlines that every village possesses a water source whose sacred quality is generally approved (1973, 154). Wells exerted deep influence upon rural people when they possessed few such devices and the reverence was decreased when they built their own. This conservative attitude is probably due to the general superstitious care that village owners manifested towards their goods. After returning from the Epiphany church service where they participated at the blessing of waters, people bring that holy water, pour into their private fountain in order to purify it and keep supernatural pollution away or in order to attain health for their family. The blessed water is also sprinkled on animals, house and other dependencies.

The general ideas about magic and religious efficacy in resolving social and personal crises – such as epidemics, droughts, earthquakes, poor harvest, thunder-storms, diseases or even death – are considered by specialists to have remained so strong in contemporary times due to the social and economical conditions of Romanian society. Social and economical instability, the absence of sufficient food provision are now considered to be an indirect reason of folk religious and mystic practices (Gheorghe 2009, 357). Diametrically opposed, what D. Hervieu-Léger named by „the revolution of food satiety” (2003) was a strong factor of secularization in highly industrialized societies.

Apotropaic rituals performed at Epiphany, as the greatest water holiday in Romania and other Orthodox countries, seem to be the Christian response to a time of impurity beginning with Christmas Eve and ending on Saint John’s Day. These 12 days of winter holidays are a period when, according to folk religious interpretation, all earthly waters are threatened by supernatural agencies. These dangers are still persisting in people’s consciousness. There is a threaten perceived in the ritual of guarding the wells the whole night before Epiphany, a night watch near village wells performed by young men who surround these places with fires and collective meals. Gradually, the ritual purpose has been ignored and the social bounding and entertainment significance increased.

In addition, people believed that during these 12 days, spirits of the dead temporarily return from their realm and travel through air in the world of livings. A very old belief is that the dead spirits enter the waters, especially at night; therefore it is prohibited to drink water brought from the well

during the night. This archaic belief emphasizes the superstitions' inventory of ritual pollution that threatens the rural wells this time of year (Caraman 1931, 77). Beside the Orthodox emphasis on Epiphany as celebration of Baptism of Jesus, the pagan function of wells is precisely acknowledged by the old version of Epiphany's name in British areas. Therefore, the old Manx of the Epiphany, *Lail Chibbyrt Ushtey* is translated "Feast-day of the Water Well" (Moore and Terry 1894, 216), a very suggestive denomination being close to ancient Rome's festival of fountains, *Fontinalia*.

Public celebrations of waters. Past and present challenges

Despite communist propaganda, the popular customs associated with the wells have survived within rural communities and continued social and collectivistic functions until our times. Yet, the ritual function of wells should never be overlooked; our personal field research in Romanian villages proved the maintaining of old fountains, marked with crosses and icons, even when villagers have began to have access to tap water.

Romanian folklore archives show varying forms of the high blessing of waters performed by the parish priest in the presence of the parishioners. The most important feature of this service is its outdoor development. Ethnographic data determined Romanian scholars to believe that the original version of this specific water blessing was carried out near a water source in a form of a traditional procession with its classic particularities and elements knew in the whole Christian world. A similar form of procession also appears in the harvest blessing, rain invoking ceremonies and even in family rituals. If the physical configuration of the community environment permits it, this water source would be running water.

In folk and official religious perceptions, this river or stream is seen as a local alternative of the biblical Jordan. But the same symbolization process could have also been accomplished by smaller and less distant water sources like the village well, for instance. In any case, the public feature of this procession is accomplished. This collective participation used to signify a public exposure of personal religious convictions and was politically discouraged during communist decades. In these circumstances, atheism being the proper public attitude, performing outdoor rituals was an impossible task. Therefore, politics influenced especially folk religious performances that were, due to traditional ties, public rituals. Communism was involuntarily encouraging a social-religious phenomenon, i.e. the

return of celebrations in the area between the walls of the church. Speaking of Epiphany, the churchgoings started to replace going to the water with bringing water inside.

In the context of the religious revival after the fall of communism, folk religion freely returned to its natural environment. Nonetheless, the slow process of reevaluation and re-enchantment of water places in rural collective consciousness also struggled with social and economic changing meanings which involved water sources.

From a sociological perspective, communism increased the distance between individualism and societalization in religious practices. This process emerged in the condition of the growing secular nationalism that stressed a much wanted civil religion of the communist society, a religion that also aspired to maintain collective identities especially within a society that promulgated a legal prohibition of communitarian religious ethics. Nonetheless, the empirical and less systematic proves of folk religiosity help to acknowledge mechanism of survival of major religious public celebration, besides all adjusted and readjusted sociological thesis of privatization and de-privatization of religion (Casanova, 1994).

Diffused forms of religiosity, flexibility of dogmas (*oikonomia* principle) within Romanian Orthodox area are due to their folk dimension and to what specialist called the ritualistic understanding of religion. This national situation could be considered a mark of secularization or an indication of growing modern values. It is indeed a process of impoverishment of the metaphysical weight, but, on a more profound level, Romanian believers haven't renounced on the fundamental anxiety generated by supernatural fears or what Peter L. Berger named "the night-side" of the human life, an experience of stepping outside the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life, a side which was systematically exorcised by secularization (1990, 84).

Our account on Romanian folk religion had to taken as a different form of modern public religion's trend. Communist' actions of banishing religion from the secular public sphere to a private protected sphere was just a temporary situation and had not a definitive influence on rural traditional spheres of expressing religious values and actions. Given the examples we offered below, we could say that these traditional practices are belonging to a sort of anti-modern ritualism, a collective reaction to the threat of globalization or secularization. Anyway, the folk religion shouldn't be

defined in residual, evolutionary terms, as well as the sacredness attributed by Romanian peasants to their wells should be addressed by a re-evaluated anthropology.

The ritual quality of public and private wells has been influenced by the industrial revolution of tap water. Having access to potable water inside their household affected the empirical and ritual care manifested by the villagers towards their old water devices. Yet, tap water is not, in contemporary times, a general condition of Romanian rural area. Beside the economic prohibition challenges that determine peasants to still go to ancient wells, one other need they cannot satisfy by tap water is the ritual need. It is a spiritual necessity that secular waters are not able to provide. Traditional people will still visit old wells to pray for rain, to take water for infant baptism, funeral practices or Epiphany blessing.

Practicing religion today could not be always considered in terms of church attendance, one topic in which sociological surveys provide answers and to which sociologists of religion tend to give a lot of credit. Nonetheless, according importance to religious behavior and beliefs "outside the church" could offer information about the survival of traditional religiosity, even when we use data provided by quantitative sociology (Pollack 2003, 237).

We have repeatedly expressed the fact peasants' worries for the future of nature were and still are strongly related to economic personal and communitarian ends and they have modeled their relationship with the environment by secular experience, by social customs and traditional attitudes and less by scientific reasons. The fall of communism signified also, for the rural way of life, the abolishment of collectivistic agriculture and the return of the land to individual owners. This re-privatization of natural resources determined a return to the empirical folk or poor technical means of production. Hence people had to stay dependent more on their supernatural support than on the economic development.

In conclusion, our paper tried to explore the transformation of folk views on nature, which had been a long process of different approaches from primitive veneration to sharply defined economic ends. By trying to explain contemporary situation of rural Romania, we assumed that the extended development of man's relations with his environment have reached a pre-communism and pre-Christian combination of facts. To name

this current situation, we highlighted, by reversing Weber's expression, the return to ritualistic, superstitious forms of this public religion. Nonetheless, folklore practices such as seasonal rituals or occasional processions don't mean that rural people are keeping untouched their spiritual values or the strong submission to God's will, or that they will begin to protect their natural heritage for less superstitious and more logical reasons. The enchantment forces that are activating Romanian folk religion in general and water places in particular seem to come from unconscious belief systems, survival strategies and mainly from long lasting social habits.

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