

The CNCS-UEFISCDI project entitled *A Contemporary Status of Collective Memory in the Case of Childbirth Customs in Moldova* (PN-II-RU-PD-2011-03-0086) was developed between October 2011 and March 2013 as a continuation of a Romanian Academy scientific research. The latter consisted in a seven years long investigation of childbirth beliefs and customs in villages from Moldova and it comprised its results in the book *Obiceiuri de naștere din Moldova. Tipologie și corpus de texte* [Childbirth Customs from Moldova. A Typology and A Texts Corpus], published in 2012. The CNCS-UEFISCDI project followed the same cultural information into the cities, since they are populated with many peasants that moved in some time ago. The purpose of this research was to see how much of the traditional behaviour survives in the pragmatic environment of towns. Moreover, participant observation and a 150 questions questionnaire were used to assess the urbanites' mental perception of superstitions after a couple of decades of urban life.

We interviewed 20 informants of different ages and with various levels of education. They were mostly women because childbirth beliefs are part of the feminine occupation of raising children. The second phase of our investigation consisted in fieldwork: we travelled back to the urbanites' native villages and asked the same questions to their family and childhood friends. The comparison revealed a high level of cultural retention. The explanations for this persistency lie in three socio-anthropological aspects; first of all, science cannot motivate at all times the upcoming of events (for example, the reason birth marks appear) and thus people turn to traditional knowledge in order to gain inner peace. Secondly, the mother and her kin experience pregnancy and confinement on an augmented affective level. This tension is clearly reflected by several gestures intended to deflect magical harm. Last, people try to influence the future positively by acts that induce good health, beauty, good luck and wealth. Technology, pragmatic thinking and impersonal environments such as hospitals (where birth is being assisted by law for the last 60 years) did not alter the folk reactions to life events in the case of the first generation of town inhabitants.

Social change transformed the traditional birth attendant into a mere ritual mask, this being a fourth type of rural characteristics that appear in Romanian towns. The midwife is now embodied by a woman who has to take the heathen child to the church for Christianization and to throw out the ritual bath water the next day. Even more so, trained midwives continue to receive today the same gift mothers have been offering for hundreds of years in order to magically clean them: a towel and soap. Examples of such gifts are given by the medical staff from "Cuza Vodă" Maternity from Iași and also by all our informants.

The conclusion of the project is more than obvious. Being populated with the first generation of urbanites, Romanian towns abound in rural beliefs and gestures. A second comparison was made with documents from The Folklore Archive of Moldova and Bucovina, gathered continuously since 1970. This data base allowed us to see the insignificant loss of superstitions in the last decades, although subjects have been living in towns. The investigation on childbirth customs exemplifies what we call *the ethnology in the midst of the city* and it can easily be extended to any other segment of traditional culture from Romania or from any other country of the world which passes through the first phase of urbanization.

a) defended papers:

Privire comparativă asupra obiceiurilor de naștere din Moldova și de la sud de Dunăre [A Comparative View of Childbirth Customs from Moldova and from the South of Danube], at „Brăiloiu Colloquiums”, the 7th edition, organized by the Folklore and Ethnography Institute „Constantin Brăiloiu”, Bucharest, 20-22 October 2011;

O perspectivă etnologică posibilă asupra obiceiului sud-est european al rodinilor [A Possible Ethnological Perspective on the South-Eastern Tradition of Rodini], at the National Conference of the Ethnological Sciences Association from Romania, Bucharest, 3-5 November 2011;

Romanian Haunted Places – Buried Unbaptized Children (Moroi), at the 6th Nord-Celtic-Baltic symposia „Supernatural Places”, Tartu, Estonia, 4–7 June 2012;

Credințele populare în contextul urbanizării – elemente comune din România și Ucraina [Folk Beliefs in the Context of Urbanization – Common Traits from Romania and Ukraine], at the 3rd Ethnography and Folklore International Symposia "Vatră dulce strămoșească" [Sweet Home of Our Forefathers], Chernivtsi, Ukraine, 14-16 December 2012;

Posibile motivații pentru funcționalitatea culturală a obiceiurilor de naștere în context urban [Possible Explanations for the Cultural Functionality of Childbirth Beliefs in the Urban Environment], at the scientific sessions organized by the “A. Philippide” Cultural Association and the “A. Philippide” Institute of Romanian Philology, Iași, 14 February 2013;

Memoria tradițională a obiceiurilor de naștere și limitele societății urbane [Childbirth Traditional Memory and the Limits of Urban Society], at the scientific session „Societatea românească în fața provocărilor mileniului 3” [The Romanian Society Facing the Third Millennium Challenges], organized by the Institute of Economical and Social Researches „Gh. Zane”, Iași, 28 February 2013.

O privire asupra deprinderilor culturale populare în contextul trecerii de la viața rurală la cea urbană [A Perspective on Folk Habits in the Context of Village to Town Migration], at the International Symposium “Integrare europeană / identitate națională; multiculturalitate – limba și cultura română: evaluări, perspective” [European Integration/ National Identity; plurilingualism/ multiculturality – the Romanian Language and Culture: Evaluations, Perspectives] organized by “A. Philippide” Cultural Association and the “A. Philippide” Institute of Romanian Philology – Romanian Academy, Iași, 25-26 September 2013.

b) book:

Credințe despre naștere în contextual urban din Moldova. Memoria tradițională [Childbirth Beliefs in the Urban Settlements from Moldova. The Traditional Memory], Iași, Editura Universității “Aexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2014, 208 p., ISBN 978-606-714-010-1

c) articles:

The Persistency of Romanian Birth Beliefs, in „Philologica Jassyensia”, VII, no. 1 (13), 2011, Iași, p. 73-82;

Romanian Beliefs and Rites of Pregnancy with Special Reference to Moldova, in „Folklore”, vol. 122, no. 3, 2011, London, p. 264-282;

The Socio-Cultural Effects of Banning Traditional Midwives from Attending Homebirth in Romania, in „Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics”, vol. 5, No. 2 2011, Tartu, Estonia, p. 81-90;

Romanian Childbirth Beliefs in the Midst of the City, in „Philologica Jassyensia”, no. 1 (17), 2013, Iași, p. 133-150;

The Fortune of the House—Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția's Perspective on Domestic Magic, in „Revista Română de Sociologie” [The Romanian Sociology Magazine], no. 3-4, 2013, Bucharest, p. 223-230.

Viitorul nou-născutului. Practici și superstiții păstrate în mediul urban [The Future of the Newborn. Folk Customs and Superstitions Maintained in the Urban Setting], in „Anuarul Muzeului Etnografic al Moldovei” [The Ethnographic Museum of Moldova Annual Publication], 2013, Iași, p. .

Obiceiurile de naștere și orașul. Reacții magice în fața amenințărilor nevăzute [Childbirth Customs and the City. Magic Reactions to Unseen Threats], in „Memoria Ethnologica”, no. 48-49, Baia Mare , 2013, p. 56-71.