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**Revitalizing culture through crafts - a case study:
Traditional embroidery in Bukovina as a
bearer of old and new meaning for contemporary
Romanians**

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1.Introduction

During the course of the last century, as the intellectual institutions consolidated and the scientific mind wrested the interpretative power over our environment and our own social realities, the trend to break with or at the very least to scrutinize all traditions, to secure the new narrative of modernity, has run its course widely unchecked, reaching a zenith in Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the "end of history"; namely in the ultimate triumph and permanent establishment of industrialized market economy democracies as the sole *modus operandi* of the new 21st century.

Implicit to the design of the modern world would be such transformations as: the gradual shrinkage of religiosity and loss of spirituality in the face of intellectualism, less play due to the increasing regimentation of life into the service of industrial work and possibly the most important change, the compartmentalization of cultural efflorescence into a rigid system of supply and demand split between a profit oriented producing group and an uninventive, passive consumer group. From a superficial perspective or one that implicitly fosters said outcome, the current state of cultural and social transformations would indicate the 'modern moment' is at hand. Upon closer inspection, however, contemporaneity unfolds in the guise of an analytically insurmountable complexity of intertwining narratives which as beautifully described by Arjun Appadurai expand by feeding on the force of an imagination which is

"no longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape [...] no longer elite pastime and no longer mere contemplation [...] (but) has become an organized field of social practices [...] a form of negotiation between sites of agency [individuals] and globally defined fields of possibility." (Appadurai 2008:31)

The status of global society post the neo-liberal politico-economic rearrangements of the last few decades, however, seems to point with increasing accuracy to a rediscovery of culture as heritage. In other words, the rapid succession of socio-economic crises coupled with political impotence towards the complexities of twenty-first century life have shaken the foundations of the scientific modernist paradigm sufficiently for people to question its totalizing claims as a universal panacea. The outcome of such *loss of faith into the modern cult* is manifesting in the form of grassroots cultural revitalization movements, which in their capacity as selective mnemonic devices as well as the heightened psychological reflexivity they demand from their members could very well revitalize not necessarily culture, but the very modality of human existence. Perhaps the twenty-first century isn't destined to function according to the *modus*

operandi of the market economy but would allow the resurgence of archaic modes of self-perception and collective being?

In late summer 2015 I attended a workshop for traditional Romanian sewing techniques in Vienna and met Ms. Ioana Corduneanu - its organizer, and the founder of the "Semne Cusute" blog. She dedicates herself to the revitalization of the Romanian textile crafting heritage by means of education, practice, popularization, but also commodification. During her talk I realized the terrible lack of knowledge I had about something that while living and growing up in Romania I had frequent, but apparently very superficial contact with. Ms. Corduneanu opened a world of ancient symbolic depth and profound understanding of the natural as well as human order reflected in the complex and unique patterns of the embroideries I had been seeing on television, on the street (very rarely), in newspaper articles or at traditional music and dance festivals that I never suspected before - it made me curious to learn more about the historic peasant garb its many types and the immense wealth of ornamentation that is found on them.

Looking deeper into this subject, I became aware of the subtle relationships between imagination, the crafts and social bonding, working to sustain the processes of identity building. I realized that this principle not only applies in traditional contexts, but is more potent in current globalized one(s).

The world today has reached a point in history which, due to political, technological and financial advancement of contemporary civilization, enables for a framework of highly accelerated intercultural exchange at an unprecedented scale, condensing time and compressing space in ways that challenge the validity of many inherited forms of identity. At the same time, however, this phenomenon has given rise to new configurations and new contexts for the expression of identity, both on local and global level. Such a revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture (Wallace 1956: 265). It is precisely the in-depth study of this phenomenon in contemporary Romania that I have chosen as the subject of my MA thesis.

1.1 Research questions

My research goal strives to explain how cultural revitalization movements, which Anthony Wallace defines as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture (cf. Wallace 1956: 265) function. In order to achieve this I shall first have to map out clearly the multitude of mutually overlapping cultural strategies the members of the "Semne Cusute" group employ when engaging with textile artifacts in order to reinforce their personal and/or collective identity while being very much aware of their positioning within global networks of meaning and structure that shape contemporary cultural narratives.

It is within these semiotic networks, that the material and symbolic dimensions of culture are appropriated, deconstructed and reinterpreted in ways that break with their historically inherited conceptual frameworks, as part of a negotiated transfer of meaning between various present and past contexts.

Exploring how traditional embroidery from Romania and more specifically from Bukovina changes meaning when being subjected to such aforementioned contextual switches, while also describing the specificities that differentiate said contexts structurally and symbolically from each other are the goals of my thesis.

The members of the Semne Cusute group teach themselves the old crafting techniques based on examples collected from all over Romania, with a particular focus on the *Ia*, the traditional Romanian blouse. The older they are, the more authentic or valuable they seem to the group. Each member has to weave their own blouse and wear it, not only on special occasions like the 24th of June (the international day dedicated to the traditional Romanian dress). By promoting it and learning to produce it by themselves they want to make it into a popular outfit once again. Wearing the blouse helps to construct their identity as individuals, as a community, and to commodify it as a national brand, which is to symbolize Romanian identity internationally.

Contemporaneity unfolds in the guise of an analytically insurmountable complexity of intertwining narratives which, as beautifully described by Arjun Appadurai (2008), expands by feeding on the force of an imagination which has become global both in form as well as in substance and is imbued with the potentiality of generating forms of agency that challenge the boundaries of established social practice. It is therefore my firm belief that any social

science study, today is bound to have globalization theory at its core in order to account for the web of interconnected meaning that permeates both the individual and the social, no matter how locally or regionally embedded its subject may be. I position my current research agenda in the conceptual framework of Arjun Appadurai's meta-theory of a social imaginary driven forward by the interconnection of global cultural flows. I believe that studying material culture and its infusion with meaning relevant to a certain group has proven instrumental in deciphering the social lives of people. It is the cornerstone of understanding the patterns of a globalized consumer society and its possible new totem: *the brand*. To this extent I will reference the work of Jean and John Comaroff who describe the socially constructed and performative character of identity and the processes which lead to their transformation and inclusion into the global marketplace of culture. Understanding how material culture is negotiated within complex social networks requires perceiving it as inherently imbued with social agency that can inform the relationships, both between itself and the individual, as well as between the individual and the collective. Daniel Miller's (1987, 2010) work on the processes shaping these interpenetrating relations of material culture and human beings either in a the capacity of producers or consumers is an incremental theoretical aspect because it can be used to explain how things become elements of cultural projects due to their capacity to store social, personal and in broader sense cultural memory, which upon appropriation can enable the articulation of self-identity. I expect my MA thesis to provide an enriching account about the global networks of meaning in which the materiality of culture and the symbolic dimensions of personal and collective identity fuse and break out of their historically inherited molds as commodities in the cultural flows of our globalized world.

The study will concentrate on researching the social networks weaving together these communities, with a particular emphasis on the learning-by-doing approach and crafts as an indicator of identity and an element fostering community. I will investigate questions such as: why did the socio-political context of post-socialist Romania engender the need for a revitalization movement? What culture concretely refer to in the context of a revitalization movement? What are the tactics of control and organization used by the leader of the movement to ensure its success? Does the traditional peasant shirt, the Ia, and its embroideries function as storage for social, personal and eventually cultural memory and how do they help articulate identity today? What would an analysis of the predominant conception of the peasant blouse as a literal "second skin" look like if, the Ia, or the peasant blouse from

Bukovina and in a larger context Romania, is treated as a garment and the wearer's second skin at the same time? What kind of societal transition is at place when such elements of the archaic mental universe are transposed from the distant rural almost mythic past into the contemporary middle-class urban context? How do new rules of wear and display emerge in such contexts and who exactly are the key actors engaged in this re-conceptualization?

Which are the reference materials used to define the authenticity of a traditional shirt and are there conflicting alternatives? What strategies of communication does the community use to make their efforts public and do they reach out to the existing institutions and state authorities tasked with managing the ethnographic heritage?

I intend to take the classical anthropological approach of participant observation, informal interviews and field research. Being an exercise in multi-sited ethnography, it will require not only travelling to different physical localities - from the large urban context to the small regional village one - but also engaging and actually taking part in their practices, differentiating between localities within and without Romania (e.g. Vienna), as well as taking into consideration the expansion of the community online.

2. Contextualizing the research

The present study focuses on presenting the meanings and the dynamics of traditional garments as they come into shape at the juncture between the social and cultural structures that shape the revitalizing efforts of the members of the "Semne Cusute" community and the realities of rural life in Romania, particularly in the mountainous region of Bukovina.

I have limited my research sites to Bucharest, the capital of Romania and the meeting place of the core 'Semne Cusute' group and the region of Bukovina, where I have visited meetings of three subsidiary branches in the towns of Piatra Neamț, Vatra Dornei and Gura Humorului. There I have also explored the rural countryside in search for clues about the continuation of the practice of traditional embroidery.

Although the Semne Cusute group is active all over Romania with subsidiary branches in most major cities from the coast of the Black Sea, to the heart of Transylvania and the Western Highlands I have chosen Bukovina to be my point of reference and comparison for two main reasons.

First, because it narrows down my research focus to a manageable size that would be appropriate for the purpose of this Master's thesis and would also be feasible for a one month fieldwork stay. Opting to make a nation-wide cross country comparative research analysis would have been given my resources impossible.

Second, by choosing Bukovina, over any other geographic or ethnic region of Romania, ties in directly with my research subject, namely the cultural revitalization strategies employed by the founder and members of the Semne Cusute community, whose initial point of reference in the effort to establish an ideal socio-cultural reference point for the handcraft of embroidering linen shirts, was the previously mentioned ethnographic study on traditional stitching from early twentieth century Bukovina written by Erich Kolbenhayer. Therefore, in returning approximately one hundred years later to the same region as the original source material I wish to extend an analytic arc across space and time which I intend to use to differentiate between facts and narrative, as well as question taken for granted assumptions about a lingering "picturesque archaic atmosphere" (Andreescu et al. 2008: 12) that have become a go-to formula for tourist guides, brochures but also in the collective imagination of urban dwelling Romanians or expats when referring to this historically much fraught over region.

In the next chapter I shall introduce the wider geopolitical and ethnographic context that defines the mountainous region of Bukovina in order to present how this region is embedded into a larger East European rural landscape. After this general outlook on the particularities of what is referred to as "The Carpathian World" I shall continue with a more detailed history of Bukovina and its many peoples. Lastly, I will offer a short overview of the histories of ethnographic writing concerning Romania and particularly Bukovina taking into account both internal sources as well as external ones, such as studies originating within the German speaking anthropological traditions.

2.1 The Carpathian World

"In mountainous areas such as the Carpathians, where modern influences are less evident, women continue to practice all of the textile arts: spinning, carding, dyeing, and weaving wool and flax cloth on home looms. Women teach their children to make cloth, to embroider it in prescribed locations and to use the motifs that are customary to their villages. A visit to the Carpathian villages enables the researcher to see these traditions practiced today. Unlike 'invented' traditions, they rise directly from the rural way of life that [...] still in part persists in the Carpathians." (Kelly 1999: 155)

Environment and human activity form a mutually referencing systemic bond, which defines the patterns of creating, exchanging and archiving, meaning, the primary means by which humans make their individual and collective existence conceptually available.¹

It is therefore, in my opinion of utmost importance for any study concerning the cultural life of a people, especially an ethnographic study, to offer a thorough and multilayered description of the geographic, climatic, historical and ultimately socio-political context.

The peasant, or rural cosmos of Eastern Europe, is a mental universe that, to this day manages to embody within it a multilayered dependency on a ritualized lifecycle, an existence open to the world, rich in ontologic diversity, embedded into, on the one hand the rhythms of the human body (birth, sexual maturation, old age and death) on the other, and more importantly, the patterns of the seasons (cf. Lutic 2009: 37). However, depending on the distinct geographic setting these patterns can and do shape human activity differently, generating diversity of experience, of the way in which they conceptualize their particular world-experience structure. This diversity is ultimately directly reflected in the variation of their ritualized and material practice.

One common distinction that applies to the rural world in Eastern Europe is the stylistic gap between the folk art produced in villages from the Carpathians when compared to art from the plains (cf. Kelly 1999: 158).

How does the Carpathian mountain range and its wider geo-climactic specificities impact life in the regions that fall under its influence?

¹ In Chapter 3. I give a detailed explanation of this systemic bond and point out how it lies at the core of cultural generativity.

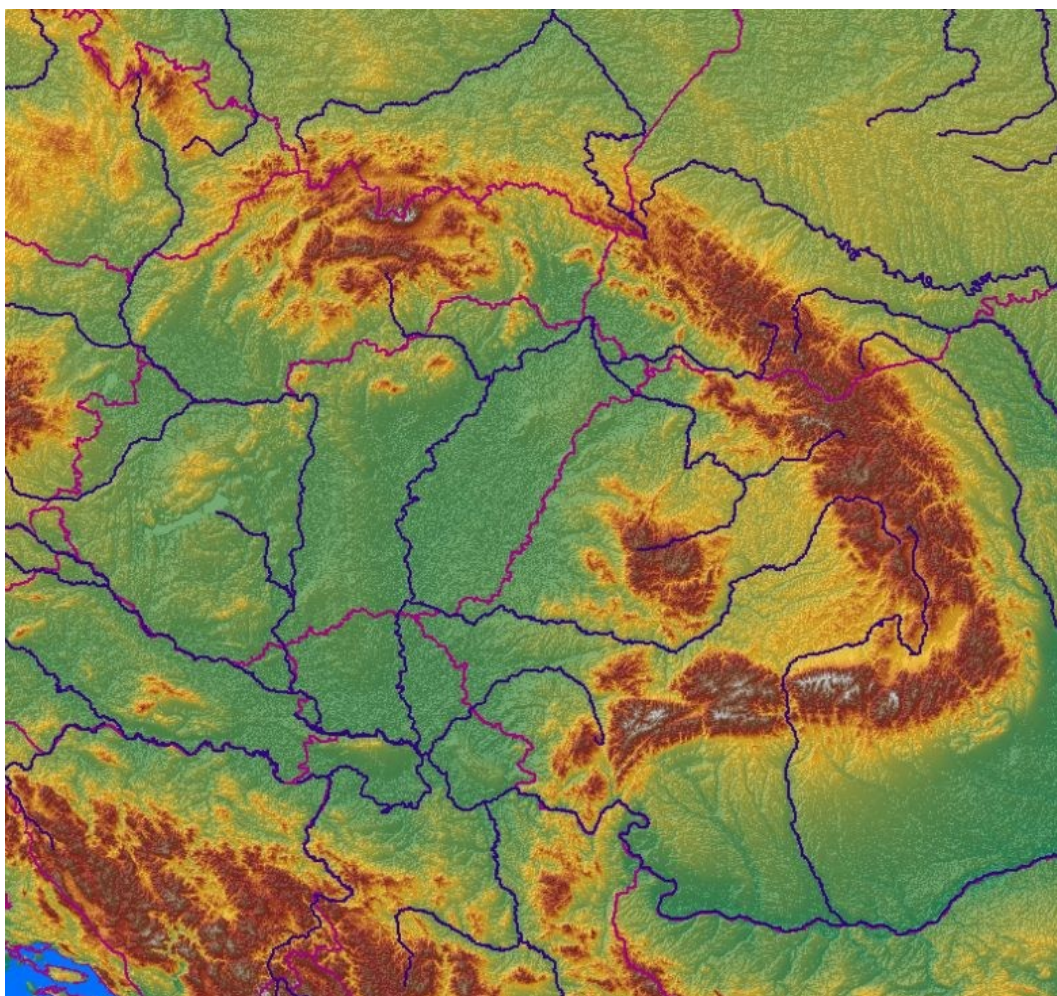


Figure 1: Relief map of the Carpathian mountains

Stretching from Vienna's Basin near Bratislava to the Timok Valley near Nis, Serbia, the Carpathian mountain range crosses the territory of seven European states, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and are the historic home for a multitude of past and present ethnic groups. In the Carpathian foothills of Slovakia, we find today villages belonging to the Goral and Rusyn people, in the snow covered high peaks of the Polish Tatras live the Lemko people. The western Ukrainian Carpathians, characterized by lower altitudes, less jagged ridges but heavily forested with pine trees are home to the Boyko and Hutsul groups. The latter can be also found in the northernmost valleys of the Romanian Carpathians, having migrated there during the middle ages. The Carpathians curve southward in Bukovina, forming the current border between Ukraine and Romania, although historically, the mountain passes and slopes provided sustenance, refuge and resources for both Romanian and Ukrainian peoples thus enabling cohabitation rather than denying it as is the case today.

Over fifty percent of the entire length of the Carpathian range is located on the territory of Romania, where the mountains form an arc following an initial north-west to south-east descent in the eastern territories, they curve at an angle of ninety degrees and stretch inland on an east to west course before curving gently southward into Serbia. Within this arc, on both sides of slopes due to repeated historic migration waves, live a multitude of ethnic groups including: Romanians, Hungarians, Székelys, Germans, Jews, Csangos, Roma, Poles, Armenians, Tatars and many more.

Evidence for the important role these mountains played in shaping the cultures of the peoples who settled them can be traced back archeologically to the Paleolithic and linguistically to the First century A.D. Etymologically, the mountains are recorded under a variety of names originating with very diverse linguistic groups who have inhabited the Carpathian range and left their mark on their rich history. The name Carpathes is first recorded in Ptolemy's work 'Geographia' and is customarily associated with the Dacian Carpi tribes and is believed to have a Proto Indo-European origin with the root *sker-/ker* which can be traced into word of many European languages denoting jagged rocky formations. In ancient Roman sources they are denominated as the Montes Sarmaticii while the early Hungarian settlers called them Havasok, due to their high peaks ranging well over 2000m in height.

The Carpathians have historically attracted human settlement both due to the wealth of available bio-resources essential for human activity such as fishing, hunting, a variety of forestry related practices, animal husbandry on alpine pastures, excellent arable terrain, rich mineral deposits and excellent balneological conditions, with many thermal and mineral water reserves, most concentrated on the territory of Romania (one-third of the European total) as well as their strategic position as a natural frontier to the expanse of the Pontic and Russian steppes (cf. Andreescu et al.2008: 4-9; Ciocă 2010: 257ff; Kelly 1999: 155-160; URL: 1; URL: 2, URL: 3;URL: 4; URL: 5; URL: 6).

Stone age flint artifacts including blades, hammer and arrow heads record continued human habitation throughout the range, however, it is in a large region stretching from North Eastern Romania to Western Ukraine, that also encompasses present day Bukovina, that the archeological record presents the most substantial findings of an interlinked network of human settlements engaging in similar modes of labor, aesthetic production, ritual and spiritual practice.

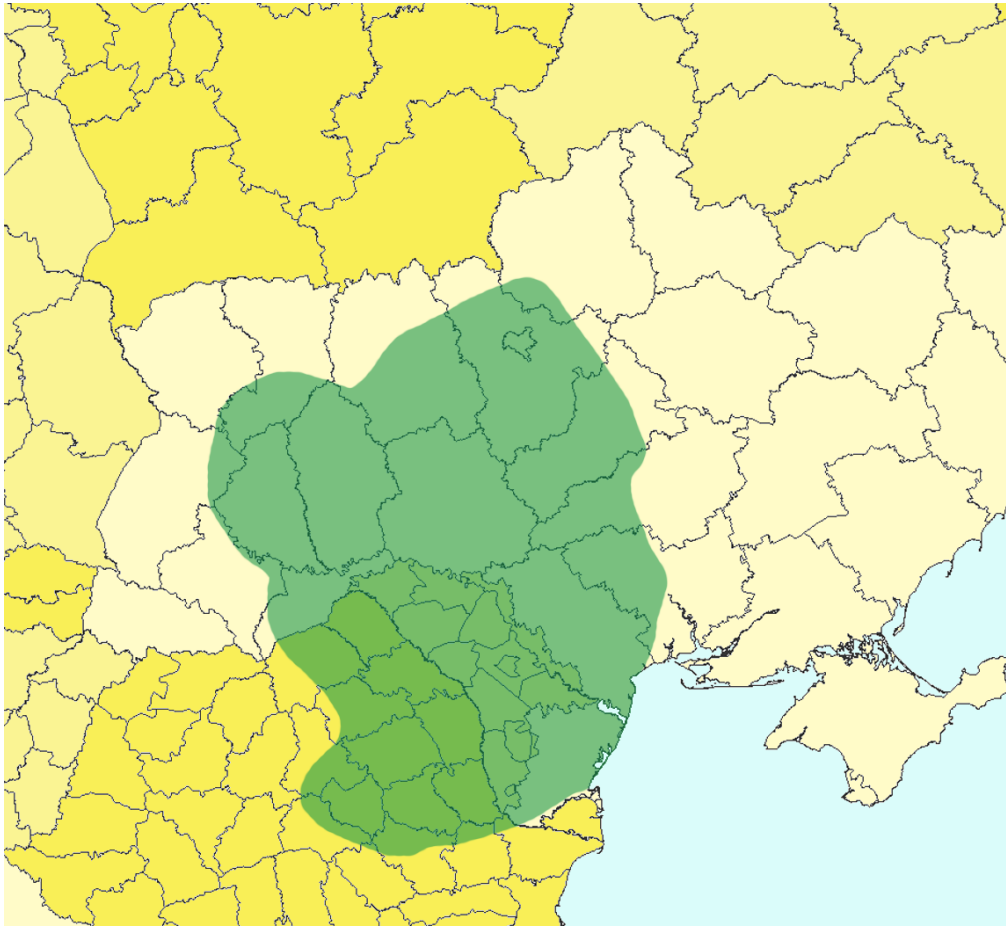


Figure 2:

Map showing the extent of the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture



Figure 3:

Location of Bukovina between northern Romania and Ukraine

Originally named after the village of Cucuteni in the proximity of Bukovina, due to the large number of ceramic artifacts excavated there in late nineteenth-century, the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture refers to perhaps the most extensive early Neolithic farming society in Europe.

A society engaging in mixed forms of hunting-gathering activities but also already having mastered cultivation it developed the largest and most densely populated settlements. Built from rows of multi storied houses ordered in concentric circles that could also function as a defensive wall, these sites rivaled in size the city-states of the Fertile Crescent, although predating them by over half a millennium (cf. URL: 3). Characteristic for a Neolithic society there is evidence for widespread farming of domesticated grains but also livestock and the earliest forms of transhumance, the seasonal migration of pastoralist peoples with their herds from the lowlands to the meadows of the high mountains in summer and back to the villages in winter, a practice that is deterministic of much of the rural society of the Carpathian world to this day (cf. Ambrusné 2009: 90ff; Ciocă 2010: 257-264; Kelly 1999: 158; URL: 6). Thus transhumance and its distinct material confirmation in the form of temporary wooden huts with an enclosure on high slopes can be found both in Poland and throughout Romania .

"A polish historian, Augustyn Maciej, claims, for example, that the tradition of shepherding in the Polish Carpathians is of Vlach (Romanian) origin. It is thrilling to find that certain words in shepherding such as branza, vatra and sihla are the same in Romanian and Polish, and that in the Polish Carpathians place names of Romanian origin still exist, like Magura, Leurda (Lavorta), and Chicerea [...]. The old architecture of peasant houses as well as the old wooden churches [...] are almost identical to those in the Romanian Carpathian area." (Ambrusné 2009: 93)



The Cucuteni-Trypillie settlements reveal an "explosion of [...] increasingly sophisticated material culture. Clay was shaped into vessels of many forms and was also used to make smoking pipes, lamps, and sculptures. [...] Ritual [...] ornamentation also became more elaborate." (DeCorse 2004: 195) The widespread usage of symbols on pottery of various shapes, sizes and usage suggests a complex spiritual and ritual system, that according to various researchers finds an unbroken continuity in the villages of the Carpathians to present times.

Figure 4: A typical Cucuteni–Trypillia clay "goddess" fetish

Made from burnt black or ochre clay most of the artifacts are anthropomorphic figurines of female figures in both prone, sitting

and standing postures. They are often portrayed in a ritual stance with arms raised in worship and have various symbols incised over their bodies, particularly over the abdomen, which indicates a concern for female fertility at the core of the spiritual belief system. Furthermore, the expert archeological opinion indicates the possibility that Cucuteni pottery may have been either draped in or handled with the use of textile fabrics (cf. URL: 3). The possibility of textiles having been part of the ritual functions in equal measure as pottery, would indicate strong parallels with the very important role cloth plays in contemporary religious practice throughout the Carpathians today. Thus it is very common for "cloths [to] guard home and the wearer, ratify contracts, convey holiness [...] or welcome a guest to the home" (Kelly 1999: 166).



Figure 5: Major types of figurines from the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture

"The Russian archeologist V.A. Gorodtsov was one of the first to notice and identify motifs on the archeological material [...] In particular, he mentioned the "fertility goddess" that appeared on both Neolithic pottery and contemporary Ukrainian ritual cloths. [He noted that village women (...) still embroidered similar motifs]." (Kelly 1999: 159)

One of the apparent central symbols on the clay figurines and pottery excavated at Cucuteni and other sites is what Boris Rybakov and Marija Gimbutas classify as the "fertile field" motif, which can be seen in use on nineteenth-century and contemporary embroidery from communities living both in the Ukrainian and Romanian Carpathians.



Figure 6: Embroidered fertile field motifs cut out from a 19th century Ie - Neamț county - Bukovina



Figure 7: Embroidered fertile field motifs on an Ie sewn by members of the Semne Cusute regional community - Neamț county - Bukovina

Interestingly, the figurines themselves, in the form of chains of female silhouettes re-appear represented on embroideries and on the many handcrafted wooden artifacts that are predominant in Bukovina and throughout the heavily forested Carpathians, such as carved porches, ladles and many more. These so called mother and daughter images emphasize not only reverence for the female principle of birth and renewal, but more importantly the special relation between women of the same lineage, especially in matters of inheritance and the passing down of knowledge. The centrality of women and their gender specific practices are what many researchers account for the continued usage of pre-Christian symbolism inherited through the ages from the women of the Cucuteni-Trypillie people (cf. Gimbutas 1989: passim; Kelly 1999: 160).

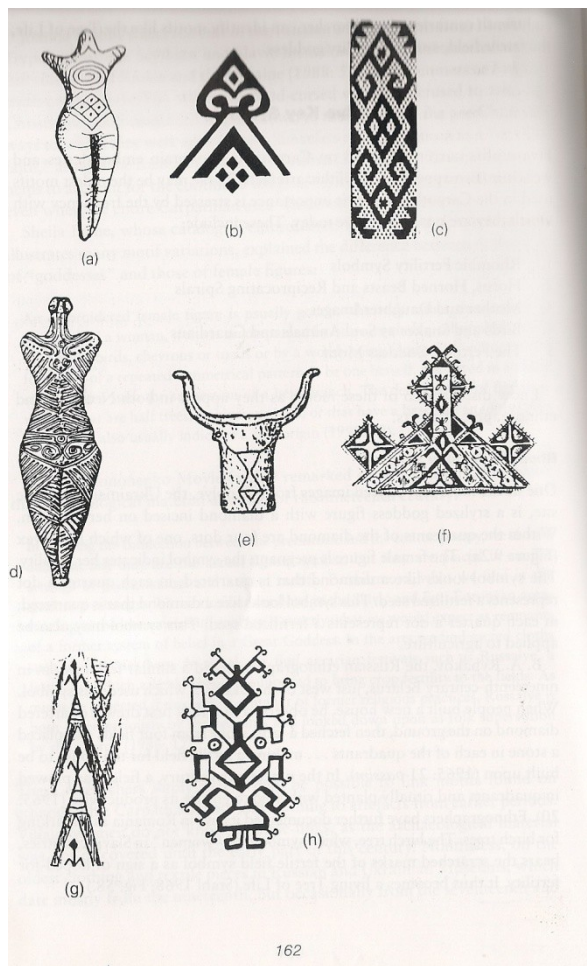


Figure 8: Fertile field variations on Cucuteni-Trypillie figurines and as Carpathian embroidery

(a)- Goddess with fertile field incised on abdomen, Cucuteni culture [present day Bukovina] 5000 BCE

(b)-Diagram showing goddess with fertile field in her skirt [...] Hutsul belt

(c)- Double goddess figures with fertile field in their skirts. Hutsul region

[...]

(f)- Horned goddess, fertile field at her ide, daughter in her skirt. Embroidered sleeve. Kosmach, Ukraine (cf. Kelly 1999: 163)

Furthermore, during my own field research with the members of the Semne Cusute community I remarked that one of the many configurations of interpretation they have adopted towards the symbolic language of the Ia relates to this special ancestral relationship between mother and daughter. For them a traditional blouse tells the genealogic history of

matrilineal lineages. I shall elaborate further on these observations as well as on the interpretative assortment of the Mother-Daughter symbol in Chapters 5 and 6.

After the dissolution of the Cucuteni culture, following many successive waves of migration from the Asiatic steppes, the Carpathian world, and especially Bukovina were "permanently caught within a 'historical vice' [...] that periodically devastated the region" (Andreescu et al.2008: 10). With each successive migration wave driving previous lowland and valley settlers away, continued human habitation was possible only in the villages on the highest slopes, inaccessible for most parts of the year.

In the next chapter I shall shortly present an overview of how the historic struggle to occupy the Carpathian space between many diverse peoples has given shape to the ethnographic landscape of present day Bukovina.

2.2 Bukovina - a brief history



Figure 9: Map of the k.u.k. Crownland Bukovina first decade twentieth-century drawn by Erich Kolbenhayer

There are few historical records about the region during the long centuries of turbulent migrations that characterized late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. There are no indications of any state formation in the region since the Aurelian Retreat of 271 until the decades following the 1241 great Tatar invasion of Europe which left the previous dominant powers of the Carpato-Pontic basin, the Kiev-Rus Voivodeship and the Hungarian Kingdom in ruins (cf. Fedorowysch 2009; URL: 7; URL: 8; URL: 9; URL: 10). The first stages of state formation in Bukovina follow King Ludwig of Hungary's 1342 decree to establish a militarized Marche on the slopes of the Eastern Carpathians and giving ethnic Romanians from the regions of Transylvania and Maramureş privileges to establish settlements with free communities at their heart. However, during the rule of Voivode Bogdan I, who reneged against Hungarian authority, the immediate centralization of rule into the feudal state of Moldavia, which he named after the Moldova river valley, due to the density of settlements found there, occurred (cf. Andreescu et al. 2008: 10; Fedorowysch 2009; URL: 11). The burgeoning independent principality of Moldavia, following several relocations of the capital from Baia, to Siret and ultimately under the rule of Peter I Muşat to Suceava, a toponym that medieval chroniclers thought derived from the Hungarian *szücs*, which means furrier and thus coincides with the main activity of Hungarian settlers during that time², the state underwent an administrative reordering, being separated into two divisions: Țara de Sus, comprising the area around Suceava and extended north-west towards the Carpathian valleys, which correspond to the Romanian territories of the future province Bukovina and Țara de Jos, stretching south-east encompassing areas around both sides of the Prut river (cf. Andreescu 2008: 11; URL: 12). One incremental distinction between these newly formed divisions relates to the ethnic admixture inhabiting them. While in Țara de Jos apart from leftover Hungarians from the previous Hungarian rule, ethnic Romanians formed majority, however, in Țara de Sus, especially in the Carpathians lived many Ruthenians and Rusyn peoples³ who were of Slavic ethnic and linguistic descent as well as Hutsuls. The most notable settlement of Ruthenians in Bukovina occurred during the reign of Stefan cel Mare (1457-1504) who was acknowledged to be a "friend of the Ukrainian peoples and protector of their settlement

² Later researchers, especially after the 1918 partitioning of former Hungarian ruled regions to Romania would generally contest any Hungarian linguistic or cultural influences in Bukovina. A consensus is yet to be reached.

³ The historical ethnonyms Ruthenian and Rusyn have undergone major critical re-assessment during the late 19th and 20th centuries. While the former was discarded for the self-assigned name Ukrainian, following the drive of nationalistic movements to create a clear distinction from other Eastern European peoples, the latter's usage was banned during Soviet rule (cf. Hryaban : 5; URL: 13)

in Moldavia and upholder of their true culture" (Fedorowytsh 2009 - translated from German by myself)

This demographic diversity and continued habitation of non-Romanian groups in the region will become extremely politicized and will provoke critical and heated debates among historians and linguists later in the modern history of Bukovina and more so during Austrian rule.

Under Muşatin rule (fifteenth- early sixteenth centuries) Țara de Sus reached its cultural, military, economic and artistic apogee. During this period many new fortified settlements and bastions were built such as the Throne Citadel in Suceava, which Turkish chronicler Mustafa Gelazade describes as follows:

"It is tall, the towers are sturdy, the gates narrow, the moat wide, it is so impenetrable that it would even prevent the flight of a bird." (Andreescu et al.2008: 19)

Furthermore, it was during this same time that Orthodox Christianity was strengthened with the construction of numerous churches and monasteries.

"Centuries of Romanian ecclesiastical art find their apogee in the string of monasteries with murals [...] The prototypical Byzantine style was transposed and filtered through the specifically local sensibility and expression." (ibid.:12)

However, as central as Christian belief would become to the people of Bukovina, Orthodoxy never supplanted the traditional rural agrarian based ritual cycle, nor the many customs with mythological origins [what Gimbutas and other researchers pinpoint as the goddess fertility cults of the Cucuteni culture] but incorporated them into its canon, a unity which Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga accurately describes as forming an axis mundi. Village life, based on human respect for the "law of the earth" and church life are inexorably intertwined (cf. ibid.; Kelly 1999: 159f)

"In ritual, we find agrarian festivals such as the Russalye, a festival in which a female being is supposed to bring crop fertility back to the fields. [...] Russalye is [...] taken seriously by the peasants [...]." (Kononenko Moyle in: Kelly 1999:160)

The Muşatin era ended with Voivode Bogdan II's treaty with the Ottoman Empire, recognizing the Sultan as his feudal lord in 1510. Moldavia became a tributary vassal state and would lose their independence to the Ottomans for the next two centuries.

"In times of Turkish sovereignty the Moldovan principality declined more and more, the voivodes lost their authority and civil war raged as the various pretenders for the throne fought each other in the struggle for Moldovan rule. Trade and agriculture collapsed, and foreigner hardly ever passed through the land. The people impoverished. Social unrest began as the boyars and convent superiors continued to repress the serfs. Additionally came raids from neighboring principalities and kingdoms that plundered and pillaged towns and villages in retaliation for the wars that Turkey let with Moldavia at its side. The Turkish rule also impoverished the settlements in Bukovina, many residents left the once tempting land, Moldova turned into a sparsely populated area." (Kwitkowskyj Denys 1956: 158 in: Fedorowytsch 2009 - translated from German by myself)

Following the Ottoman defeat of the Russo-Turkish war of 1768 - 1774 Moldavia was occupied by Russian troops, which unsettled the Austro-Hungarian court in Vienna, which feared further Russian mobilization in the Carpathians that could jeopardize their hold on the mountain passes and would fervent religious proselytism and thus turmoil with the Orthodox Romanians in Transylvania, even though the two imperial powers were allies. This determined Empress Maria Theresia, who was also Queen of Hungary to protest this occupation and intercede in the negotiations on behalf of the historical proclamations of the Hungarian Crown on these territories. In July 1774 during the peace talks of Kücük Kainarci the Austro-Hungarian delegation managed to realize all its intended strategic goals, namely the withdrawal of Russian troops and the acknowledgement by the Ottomans of Austria's strategic interest in bridging the gap between their two major provinces Transylvania and Galicia thus establishing a continuous border to Russia.

The demarcation treaty of Balamutka for the Austro-Hungarian annexation of the territories along the Eastern Carpathians, which included Țara de Sus and its neighboring regions was signed on 2nd July 1776 by Freiherr von Thugut and Grand Visir Izet Mehmet Pascha. The importance of this treaty is paramount, since it not only demarcates the borders of the new province but is the first official document attesting its new ascribed name: Bukovina (cf. Ceaușu 1998: 49-63; Fedorowytsch 2009; URL: 7; URL: 12). The new toponym did not come without much controversy, as:

"In the not too distant past, it was mistakenly believed that the name of the province derived from that of Austrian General Bucow, who conducted the military campaign that led to the annexation of the Bukowina by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The name Bukowina in fact derives from the German *Buchenland*. The Slavonic *buk* (Fagus) is a Germanic loanword of ancient date (Old German **bokaz*, gothic **boka*), which entered the proto-Slavonic languages

after the Slavs moved west of a line drawn through Königsberg-Siedlice-Lublin-Bukowina, east of which the beech-tree does not flourish." (Andreescu et.al. 2008: 8)

The new name attesting thus to the presence of both Germanic and Slavic peoples in the region from antiquity was proposed by General Spleny, the first governor of the region, in a report to the Council of War in Vienna. The new name also came to reflect one crucial geographic fact that deeply influenced the local rural culture, namely the fact that Bukovina is, to this day, a land covered in vast beech forests. In fact, Romania has the second-largest surface of virgin forests in Europe, 65% of which is in the Carpathians (cf. Ceașu 1998: 63ff; URL: 1). The centrality of forestry, wood carving and other forest related activities is numerously attested throughout Bukovina.

"Here in Bukowina has flourished a veritable culture of wood: the wooden houses and churches of the region, with their meticulously carved open porches, are like jewels." (Andreescu 2008: 13)



Figure 10: Carved wooden porch of community home in the village of Ciocănești, decorated with dominant stylized fertile field symbols.

underperforming due to their technologically rudimentary setup. In the course of colonization of the country, Emperor Joseph II began an extensive resettlement program of Germans, particularly Danube Swabians and later of Ruthenians from Galicia, in order to on the one hand repopulate a territory that was below average in population density and on the other to bring technical experts and craftsmen to the land which could accelerate the intended modernization processes. German farmers brought high-quality agricultural knowledge, the use of which enhanced crop yield substantially to the point that subsequent crop yields from Bukovina exceeded the average crop yields of other Austrian provinces. Fishing and livestock farming throughout the country also received strong development impetus from the court in Vienna through fiscal privileges and technical support, through encouragement of good practice and examples. The state-owned Radautz stud farm, which was operated for military requisition, provided such positive and outstanding examples for the local population, which in turn gave a boost to the growth of livestock throughout the country.

Czernovitz developed substantially under Imperial authority. It housed the largest garrison of the region which requiring constant provisions and upkeep helped the local economy and burgeoning industry. On the 4th of January 1845 the easternmost German speaking university, Die „Francisco-Josephina“ Universität, was inaugurated. Although the main teaching language would be German, it was legally binding for the institution to offer both Ukrainian as well as Romanian classes (cf. *ibid.*; Fedorowytsch 2009; Stourzh 1995: *passim*; URL: 7; URL: 14).

Throughout Habsburg rule, Bukovina underwent several administrative transitions, from its initial administrative organization as a military district, it was then incorporated into the Kreis Czernovitz, of the Austro-Hungarian constituent kingdom of Galicia-Lodomeria, which caused reason for social unrest because the province would become politically subordinate to the Polish officials in Lemberg. Further negative consequences were the regulations regarding official language status. While both Romanian and Ruthenian vied for recognition only the former was granted this privilege at a time where after massive Ruthenian migration they comprised an ethnic majority. In order to resolve the rising ethnic divisions Bukovina was restructured into a separate Crownland and the provincial government in Czernovitz was returned its political authority (cf. *ibid.*). Furthermore, the public school system was revised and expanded so that by the time of the First World War there were 488 primary schools with teachers accurately representing all ethnic groups. School children would have their native language and German as a mandatory subject matter in school, while the reforms mandated

that classroom languages of multi-ethnic communities be German, Ukrainian and Romanian and a training program for teachers foresaw the availability of tutors capable of teaching in each of these (Wagner 1985:46).

Although there were partial ethnic tensions, especially in the latter half of the 19th century, the Austrian rule managed an efficient assimilation process in a province where it has run a policy supportive of immigration throughout its rule, thus "the 1910 census counted 800,198 people, of which: Ruthenian 38.88%, Romanian 34.38%, German 21.24% (Jews 12.86% included), Polish 4.55%, Hungarian 1.31%, Slovak 0.08%, Slovene 0.02%, Italian 0.02%, and a few Croat, Romani, Serbian, and Turkish" (URL: 7).

One of the most important administrative reforms was passed in 1910 as a measure to supplicate ethnic relations between Ruthenians and Romanians. On May 26, 1910, the so-called **Nationalitätenausgleich** came into force, essentially restructuring the Landtag, into a cabinet consisting of four regional deputies and only two appointed from outside of Bukovina. This measure which made a significant contribution to the pacification of political life in Bukovina as it gave government representation next to the majority populations also to Germans, Jews and other minority groups. Furthermore, the head of clergy was also granted co-determination rights. Unfortunately, this progressive form of government was abolished following the collapse of the monarchy as a consequence of the First World War (cf. Fedorowytsch 2009; Stourzh 1995: passim; URL: 7; URL: 14).

The Austro-Hungarian rule in Bukovina although not ideal could thus be summarized with the following remark:

"The Bukovina in the last years of peace represents a model - though somewhat utopian - for a peaceful coexistence of different peoples in a limited settlement area [...]." (John Leslie 1910: 136 in: Stourzh 1995: 52)

In 1918, following the Treaties of St. Germain and Trianon, the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, now represented by the republic of Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary renounced all territorial claims to Bukovina, thus it was unified with the Romanian kingdom and in the decades that followed up until the outbreak of the Second World War, the nationalist regional regime lead by Iancu Flondor who although elected by the Council of Bukovina did not get the vote of the Ukrainian delegation, initiated an intensive process of assimilation aimed at the ethnic Ukrainians. Ethnic Ukrainian schools were closed and Romanian became the only classroom language in public schools (cf. URL: 7; URL: 14).

In 1940 northern Bukovina was annexed by the Soviet Union in breach of the Ribbentrop Molotov Pact only to be re-conquered in 1941 by the Romanian Army allied to the Axis. During the war many Bukovina Germans were resettled into the German heartlands. Pogroms

and forced deportation against Jews and Roma essentially depopulated the region of these ethnic groups.

After the war Bukovina was split in two halves without care or attention to the ethnic layout of the lands, the Soviet regime drew the political border between Soviet Ukraine and Romania arbitrarily along the Carpathian crescent. The seat of the regional government and the city of Czernovitz were incorporated into the newly formed state. Ukrainian was mandated and all cultural and economic connections between north and south Bukovina were severed. Romania lost more than half of the territory of



Bukovina.

Figure 12: Bukovina as divided in 1940: Soviet to the north, Romanian to the south

During Soviet and later communist rule much of the rural regions of Romania underwent forceful collectivization. Land ownership changed, peasants were deprived of their property and intellectuals as well as members of the former nobility were subjected to political incarceration and other forms of state sanctioned discrimination. These measures were designed to erase all traces of ethnic, religious and historic continuity via resettlement, forced labor, nationalization of property and especially land. Women were forced to become laborers in factories or on enormous collective farms and textile mills, alongside men. With people fully employed in the labor structures of the communist state machinery and severe shortages of commercial products craft making was steadily halted. Thus for example traditional home textile production which was ubiquitous throughout Romania and Eastern Europe would gradually disappear to be replaced by state sanctioned homogenous designs produced en-masse and centrally distributed, thus regional differentiation of designs would be eroded and the loss of symbolic specificities would proceed unhindered. Although the effects

of mass industrialization are not a distinct feature of communism, as the first efforts to introduce mass-production to the region happened during Habsburg rule, it reached its zenith during the 1960s when the majority population needing cheap working uniforms could no longer afford the time to make them at home, thus started buying ready-mades in large quantities (cf. Kelly 1999: 157-171; Iuga 2016: 40).

"The local festivals initiated and organized in the communist period were also crucial in changing traditional garments all over Romania [and Eastern Europe]. In the context of folklore performance, traditional costumes started to be standardized, as the members of professional dance groups had to be dressed in the same manner". (Iuga 2016: 40)

The purpose of such new festivals was clear, dissemination of Soviet propaganda and the ideals of the state, therefore, they had little in common with the high festivals of the peasants rooted in pre-Christian beliefs, and were thus more akin to theater or carnival performances. Ironically, the Soviet ethnography at the same time was emphasizing the importance of pre-Christian ancient influences in the cosmology of the rural populace. Funding major initiatives for collecting traditional rural artifacts throughout the Soviet territories (cf. Kelly 1999: 171).

Fortunately, "in the Carpathian mountains, collectivization was impossible. Plots of land were too small, too remote and difficult to reach in winter. The people retained their old ways, their small gardens and domestic animals, and women continued the custom of hand-made textile production that stretched back for generations. Not only were the techniques of production saved, but the old motifs." (Kelly 1999:171)

Collectivization was never truly implemented in Bukovina also because of the efforts of dedicated people such as Prof. Radu Rey, who intent on preserving the specific cultural practices of the mountain pass villages, especially those related to animal husbandry and forestry made a direct appeal to stop the already initiated process to Ceaușescu, the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (cf. Fitiu 2017). After the fall of communism succeeding the 1989 Revolution Romania opened its borders and adapted a political vision in line with Western European states, successfully becoming a member state of the EU in 2007. However, for many Romanians, faced with severe economic disparity between rural and urban contexts, rising prices but stagnant wages and widespread concerns about corruption this meant an opportunity to emigrate. Approximately four to five million Romanians are living or working abroad in the EU, thus the relations between the Romanian Diaspora and those back home are increasingly gaining social and even political relevance, as many from

the Diaspora, having lived and worked in First World Nations are returning home with new ideas, demanding a more socially equitable government capable of implementing efficient regulation in the private market sectors which, since the revolution have mostly fallen prey to exploitative foreign investors. Furthermore, these returning Romanians demonstrate a clear vision about many aspects of personal, public and cultural life, but also with a better and more clearly pronounced appreciation for local, regional specificity, tradition and heritage awareness of their own history and heritage, which inspired by models of heritage valuation from abroad, they seek to channel into the development of either public or private organizations, enterprises or movements that attempt to fill a considerable gap in state sponsored heritage management platforms (cf. Fitiu 2017; Iuga 2016: 42; URL: 15).

In the next chapter I shall discuss the history and production of ethnographic discourse in and on Romania. Providing an insight into who were the key producers of ethnography about Romania, the major themes of their work and a critique of their hegemonic tone. Ultimately I shall showcase the research possibilities that could become available when addressing the vagaries of contemporary cultural production in Romania and implicitly, Bukovina.

2.3 Romania and the ethnographic gaze

The peasant, or rural cosmos of Eastern Europe, is a mental universe, that to this day manages to embody rich cosmological diversity and lively traditional practices.

During the course of the last two centuries, however, this archaic world became the subject of intense scrutiny by the powers in charge of the modernist paradigmatic schism and their agents, namely the burgeoning sciences, anthropology included, which saw "the colonial subjects of France, Britain and later, Germany become the object of a formidable apparatus of ethnographical study [which more often than not] was cast as a state enterprise (Rampley 2011: 124f)". Yet the colonial implications of Western European anthropological traditions are well documented and eclipsing the similar implications of another imperial power and its colonial gaze eastward, namely the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Even though the Central European empire followed a very distinct approach towards its sphere of influence, an approach which foresaw more flexible center-periphery relations, that also transposed into its ethnographic projects, the similarities to the broad enterprise of modernism and the scientific supremacy it nurtured are pertinent. Thus "groups such as the Croats, the Romanians, the Ukrainians, or the Slovaks became subject of [the rationalizing gaze of early 20th century] ethnographic discourse" (ibid.).

While as Michael Haberlandt accurately notes there were important differences of methodology and ideological interest between the Austrian ethnographic project and for example the very nation centric German model; the latter as best exemplified by Wilhelm Riehl's essay "Ethnography as a Science" from 1859 saw the primary function of ethnography to "legitimate the idea of the nation, to promote the imagined community of the people (ibid:125)" the former "was above all an exercise in demographic mapping (ibid.)". Needless to say, both subscribed to the dominant modernist Zeitgeist of anthropocentrism and put central emphasis on what Allen Abramson and Martin Holbraad call the anthropologic cosmology of the global human world (cf. Abramson et.al. 2012: 40), which "project[s] human being[s] concentrically and spatio-temporally along a social and cultural gradient, stretching outward from a series of civilized centers (ibid.:37)". So in the end, the early ethnographers of the Danube monarchy made the same mistakes as their Western counterparts and failed to observe difference as ontologic, that is as indicative of meaning imbued within the material world, but assumed it to be indicative of human conceptual capacity and therefore implicitly be subscribed to a hierarchical scaling of *who comes up with the closest to reality interpretation possible* (cf. Abramson, Holbraad 2012: 36ff; Henare et.al. 2007: 9f; Rampley 2011: 127).

This trend comes to light in the context of the 1873 World Fair hosted in Vienna. The event was a spectacular and massive undertaking which aimed to rival with the grand fairs hosted in London and Paris previously while maintaining an ambition to represent the multifaceted variety of "contemporary cultural practice" at the thresh hold between East and West. One of the most opulent and large pavilions presented was the one featuring 'The Bourgeois House and its Internal Furnishings and Decoration' in direct comparison to 'The Farmhouse, its Furnishings and Appliances' (cf. Rampley 2011: 112).

While both pavilions provided ideal means of representing social and cultural identity and proved to be particularly effective at stirring critical discussions addressing the relation between urban and rural society, it was the exhibit featuring the farmhouse reconstructions from around the various imperial regions, that "came to function as an important symbol [especially when considering that] the notion of the 'peasant' underwent significant semantic shift in late nineteenth century; from being a social and economic category in the 1860s and early 1870s, the concept came to function as a signifier of ethnicity (Rampley 2011: 112f)".

The exhibition being devoted primarily to farmhouse architecture it soon came to pass that "the farmhouse came to be seen as typifying the cultural [and in later more nationalistic reviews, the racial] traits of its inhabitants (Rampley 2011:120)".

"At times the farmhouse could provide the pretext for strong social and cultural prejudices. One notable example was a study of Romanian peasant housing in Bukovina by Elias Weslowski, director of the technical college in Kimpolung [now Campulung Moldovenesc] in southern Bukovina." (Rampley 2011: 127)

In this study, the author bolsters his beliefs about a national and racial hierarchy by using his biased analysis of the material culture and folk traditions of peasants from Bukovina to enforce a picture of backwardness and mental sluggishness among the Romanians, he describes as "full of superstitions and belief in spirits (ibid.)". It is clear that such radical examples are definitely not the norm for ethnographic discourse at the time but are beyond a doubt a direct product of the modernist rationalization and epistemologic reduction which was indeed the scientific norm for well over two centuries. Even such well thought through, precisely executed, well researched and long term ethnographic research focusing on the material culture, and in particular the peasant textile handcrafts from the Bukovina, such as the work of Erich Kolbenheyer, makes no attempts whatsoever to treat things as indicators of historic developments and cosmologic structures, rather than indexes of ethnicity (cf. Henare et.al 2007: 3).

Similarly, works produced under the auspices of another major European literary and scientific tradition, that of the Russian Empire concern themselves, in line with the programmatic vision of the Enlightenment, heavily with detailed documentation of daily rural life aimed primarily as descriptive tools used for the purpose of policy making and better governance (Hryaban 2004: 20-39). One of the earliest scholars to publish ethnographic works about Bukovina in this tradition was Grigorij Kupczanko, a native of Czernovitz, who dedicated his publishing career to the cause of the Ruthenian [Ukrainian] minority in the Crownland. Educated in Vienna he established close intellectual relations to the burgeoning social and nihilist movements in Russia, leading to a conceptual and theoretical dichotomy in both his scientific and journalistic work. The tension between the strategic use of essentialist reasoning in the sense of social political goals and the idealized relationship to the past and consequently a lost identity permeates Kupczanko's entire scientific and journalistic work. Comprising numerous pamphlets, over 2000 articles published in the Russian language London based 'Zwesda' and Vienna based 'Russka Prawda' journals, of which he himself

was editor in chief his writings present an erudite and inclusive description of both material culture, linguistic particularities, ritual practice and daily routines of the Ruthenian farmers

from Bukovina. Unlike his Austrian contemporaries his work did not assume to equate social conflicts in the region with ethnic, biologic origins nor any implicit qualitative assumptions that would be derivative of such considerations. Throughout his publications his main concern was establishing a basis for methodological fieldwork and systematization of large scale data. With „Einige historische und ethnographische Angaben über die Bukowina“ published in 1875 through a research grant by the Russian Geographic Society, Kupczanko created the first Russian language, empirical ethnographic analysis of village life in Bukovina; albeit with a distinct bias for the clear demarcation of ethnic boundaries between the various groups, as well as the goal of proving the historical continuity of Slavic settlement and cultural life in Bukovina. As much as he focused on seeking the common denominator which could determine a continuous and unitary Slavic presence in Bukovina, he was also the first to catalogue all the diverse linguistic, ethnic and historic subgroups of the people with Russian roots living in the Carpathian basin and draw extensive comparative accounts highlighting both similarity as well as difference (cf. Hryaban 2004: 17f). These considerations, however, proved to be politically charged as they contravened the dominant narrative for k.u.k. ethnography as laid out by Karl Czoernig in his study 'Ethnography of the Austrian Monarchy' which emphasized "resistance to the idea of national cultures and promotion of the multinational state [and] the notion of the hybrid nature of the peoples of the empire (Rampley 2011: 126)". Constantly trying to establish an ethnography for the betterment of the living conditions of the rural populations by feeding the results of his research back into the communities he investigated Kupczanko was a forerunner of applied anthropology. He also pioneered new technologies as ethnographic tools, thus being the first to use photography to extensively document the clothing of Ruthenian peasants as worn both at the daily fieldwork as well as at special events such as marriages or funerals or during the high festivals. Maintaining his systematic method of data collection in the study „Die Bukowina und ihre russischen Einwohner“ he managed to accurately depict the cyclic patterns according to which rural people alternated their clothing to match the seasonal calendar. Other topics which he extensively covered in his many years of data collection were: home building, farmhouse design and decorative elements, artifact and tool usage, division of labor, spiritual beliefs and mythology, collections of chants, riddles and magico-religious utterances or dances as well as detailed descriptions of various subsistence and

economic practice (cf. Hryaban 2004: 15-20). The earliest accounts providing rich description of both the land and the people of the Eastern Carpathian slopes however, come from Romanian sources. Dimitrie Cantemir's 'Descriptio Moldaviae' published in 1714 at the request of the Royal Academy in Berlin is not only important due to its historically invaluable



Figure 13: Map of medieval Moldavia

information about the geo-political makeup of the region, providing the first drawn map of the feudal state of Moldavia but also because it is what can be categorized as the earliest ethnography of Moldavia (cf. URL 16; URL: 17).

It is, however, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Romanian ethnography starts developing its methodology and theoretical focus. It is during this period that the rural world becomes a central topic of systematized and later also state sponsored analysis. The works of this period no longer merely gather data and provide descriptions but consider themes such as diffusion and evolution of material culture, begin hermeneutic analysis of decorative motifs, and establish guidelines of interpretation which mirrored Boasian cultural relativism, Alexandru Dima stipulating that artifacts share a mutually referencing bond with the social life of the community, thus any meaningful interpretation cannot be disjointed from the world views and self perception of the people who created or use them (cf. Iuga 2006: 66). The pioneering works of Romanian ethnography and peasant studies are George Oprescu's 1922 work 'Arta țărănească la Români' who is amongst the first to approach the ethno-genesis of the stylistic developments in Romanian rural crafts and trace their historic continuities, also suggesting possible links to pre-history, a topic which as previously explained gained momentum once Marija Gimbutas and her team extensively documented the Cucuteni artifacts and observed similarity in decorative motifs. Furthermore, Oprescu also raises alarms about the gradual fading of traditional lifestyle under the modernizing influence of industrialization. Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș's work was visionary as he established the basis for future Romanian Museology in the field of folk

art/crafts. Romulus Vuia published his holistic study of Romanian village life in 1945 under the title 'Satul Românesc din Transilvania și Banat' where he catalogues the typology of villages based on the disposition of housing and type of activity. Furthermore, he also establishes the importance of structured comparative analysis, comparing his data on Romanian villages with the types of settlements from neighbouring peoples. Vuia's use of data to form integrating analysis, building associations between various branches of village craft and the socio-economic organization of village life in the regions he studied can be considered the blueprint for the village monographies commissioned by the Academy of Social Sciences in Bucharest later in the second half of the century.

Around the same time specialized studies start being published, such as Artur Gorovei's work 'Ouăle de Paști', a detailed ethnographic work describing the techniques of egg painting as well cataloguing the stylistic range of the motifs. The study is of great international importance as well because the author traces the practice to ancient fertility rites and demonstrates its prevalence in both contemporary and past European, Middle Eastern, in particular Egyptian as well as African societies. Other thematic studies on particular aspects of Romanian rural crafts are the works of Janeta Scaueru-Tecul, who catalogues the techniques of rug weaving and dying and Lena Constante's biographic text on the life of holy icon painters. As photography became increasingly available during the interbellum years, several photographic collections providing a vivid and detailed visual documentation of daily and religious life and the dress types associated with it were being collected, of which the albums of Tache Papahagi would later be recognized to provide rare ethnographic insight into the rural life of high mountain villagers. During communist rule there is a veritable industry dedicated to ethnographic text production. Although the regime has a rather negative stance towards rural traditions it nevertheless, supports descriptive works detailing the skill and craftsmanship of the peasant populations. I shall not enumerate the large volume of regional descriptive collections that were produced during this period, but will resume by pointing out the important observation made by Paul Petrescu in his work 'Motive decorative celebre' where he emphasizes the fact that the peasant craftsman when applying traditional decorative motifs on his artifacts is never mechanically copying nature, but is transcribing its cyclic manifestations into a repeating code using symbols and signs that require an act of interpretation and thus translation to be deciphered (cf. Iuga 2006: 71ff). Henry and Paul Stahl's studies on peasant genealogy and its representation in the decorations used to delineate different lineages and groups within village communities is also noteworthy and of

particular interest for the observations I made during my own fieldwork, where I noticed the predilection of Semne Cusute members to attribute personal and familial interpretations to the symbols embroidered on the Ie. Furthermore, such a genealogic reading of the symbols is used actively by Ms. Corduneanu as a means to give the traditional shirts a seemingly contemporary meaning that attracts especially the youth, but it is obvious that such considerations are no innovation in this field. Unfortunately, if the state supported ethnographic research, even if limited in scope, during the communist regime, today anthropologic studies are given hardly any institutional benefits and even less so is granted to works that focus on rural settings, although it is the village setting that is confronted with strong social dynamics of change, mostly fuelled by large scale migration back and forth to urban centers both inland and in foreign countries, which elicits cultural shifts present in the form of transformations in the habits, agency, technological innovation and values of the local populace. The village world therefore is today just as much a microcosm for the study of large scale phenomena affecting entire nations, people and periods of time as it used to be at the dawn of ethnography.

3.Theoretical framework

The theoretical point of departure for my analysis lies in the conceptual tool kit provided by cultural analysis, which I complement with selected elements of systems theory and anthropological semiotics, in order to better break down the semantically obfuscated notion of culture, to its constituent elements, such as symbols, systems and within these coding processes or operations and ultimately and most importantly, the "strategies of action" that form "persistent ways of ordering action through time"(Swidler 1986: 273), in other words, the observable routines people engage in to achieve various goals.

T.H Eriksen writes in his introductory work to social and cultural anthropology, that culture has been described as one of the three most complicated words in the English language (cf.Eriksen 2001: 3).

The earliest scholars distinguished culture as something intrinsically human, as the prime characteristic that sets us apart from all other species, because it reflects our ability to create both materially and intellectually, "[...] the fundamental nature of culture (and its current host, humanity) [is that of] a creative, *generative* system that [...] *makes things*, and also *makes things happen* (Drummond 1996: 33). Culture is therefore both the result of and the model for such creative processes, a concretely human innovation (cf.Eriksen 2011: 3; Knorr 2011:

14). It is vital to understand culture as both cause and effect to be able to analyze how it affects an actor, be it an individual, a group, a corporate entity or any other social form endowed with agency in its capacity to make choices for or against different sets of actions. Therefore culture is both the result of a sequence of actions, be it in immaterial (eg. a religious or political ideology) or material (eg. ritual artifacts pertaining to a religious or political ideology) form, as well as a distinct "system of meanings or interpretations individual constantly and necessarily employ [...] in the attempt to give form to an enigmatic and inchoate human identity, and in the process to resolve or suspend conceptual dilemmas that would otherwise make ordinary life impossible" (Drummond 1996: 11). We can thus infer the primary programme of culture being in the first instance the generation of a system of conceptual orderings of the experience humans have of the world and everything in it, themselves included, and in the second instance "a self conscious realization of themselves [...] as sentient, human subjects"(ibid.:28). Hence, the root cause for the sheer complexity and difficulty in defining culture as previously mentioned, becomes apparent with the semiotic function of the term, namely an extremely broad attempt at summarizing the modestly understood processes of symbolization through which people experience and express meaning, or described in simple terms, the relation between thoughts and things (cf.Drummond 1996: 28ff, Swidler 1986: 273).

Meaning, its distribution patterns and impact on human agency lies at the core of culture, thus the task of an analysis grounded in anthropological semiotics "is to identify the synthesis of perceptual and conceptual cues involved in [engaging any of the symbolic vehicles of culture, such as ritual practices, art forms, labor, language and many other informal but heavily influential practices such as gossip, stories and routines of daily life (cf. Swidler 1986: 273)] and then to describe how that synthesis, the meaning of [any particular symbolic vehicle], affects an individual's thoughts and actions in a wider social context" (Drummond 1996: 27). It is now apparent that the prime medium for the dissemination of meaning readily available for humans are symbols.

Symbols are conveyors of meaning, thus they are made up from a set of ideas that are based in the human experience of the world and a set of material signifiers that stand for those ideas due to various types of associative connections that can be recognized among the two (cf. Layton 2006: 30).

According to the tenets of semiology, "the science that studies the life of signs in society" as defined by its founder, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, due to their previously described function, symbols are a type of sign. Namely one that refers to the material signifier it is coupled with by purely arbitrary means, thus is "an arbitrarily imposed signification [that] cannot be derived through the senses" (White 1949: 29f). Conclusively Charles Pierce emphasizes that symbols bare relevance only due to cultural convention alone, and are therefore typologically different from other signs such as icons, which stand in a relation of similarity to the objects they represent: a photograph, and indexes, which demonstrate an existential relation, where the sign has something in common with what it refers to: smoke is naturally associated with, and therefore points to, fire (cf.Kienlin and Widura 2014: 32; Layton 2006: 30).

The gist of the semiotic model, however, is its reliance on the cognition of individuals, in order for signs to function in their role as bearers of meaning they must first have a form that is open to the human sensory apparatus, and second, they must be actively recognized by their users, i.e. humans, as signs, or having semiotic potentiality (cf.Eco 1977: 25-27 in Kienlin and Widura 2014: 33; Layton 2006: 32; White 1949: 31).

These restrictions, as well as the dominant reliance of classical semiology on language as a primary semiotic model, open it up for critique. The main dilemma semiologists face can best be exemplified in Roland Barthes' work *Mythologies*, where he makes a conceptual distinction between linguistic and meta linguistic meaning, and implies a sequential order in the way humans create signs "so that the world is first [...] endowed with named things [through a natural process of establishing utterance-concept pairs] and then those named things acquire cultural associations" (cf.Drummon 1996:26ff). There are many problems with this view which become clearer when looking at empirical contexts. Barthes' emphasis on the conceptual potency of language as the prime semiotic vehicle, "a device for naming objects, independent of cultural determinations those objects may have acquired as elements in long-standing human (and proto-human) interaction systems"(ibid.: 26) overlooks the premise of semiotics, that language itself does not exist outside of the regulatory mechanisms of human collective experience as it relies on the negotiation of a set of rules based on trial and error (Layton 2006: 34) that allows for the recognition of the meaning 'that thing in the yard with apples growing on it' in the form of the sound 'tree'. Second if Barthes' suggestion "it is the words we choose to talk about things that reveals their meaning to us" (Layton 2006: 32) is correlated with White's (1949: 29f) assertion that through language a theoretically infinite

number of form value combinations are possible leading to meaning which is idiosyncratic to the individual, then how do members of a society reach consensus let alone maintain functioning cross generational traditions in the face of imminent change driven by the constancy of reinterpretation manifest at the level of the individual? Georg Simmel accurately notes that "the whole history of society is reflected in the striking conflicts [...] between socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands" (Simmel 1957: 542).

The answer to this dilemma can only be reached by discarding the linguistically dominated understanding of semiology, which presupposes that the conceptual order of the world is solely attributed to the faculty of human imagination, and by embracing the generative role of the environment in the symbolization processes humans use to make sense of their existence. Understanding that the "incessant interaction with endlessly varied artifacts is [after all], the empirical reality of human life and what makes it so singular" (Ingold 2012: 429) is vital to achieve this, because it demystifies the key concept of the entire debate: '*meaning*'.

The clear-cut distinction between thinking as a hermetically closed off process that bares and attributes meaning to a material world, waiting inertly to be molded and essentially made manifest by the former I.E.: cosmos is only real as far as we, as linguists, semiologists, anthropologists (or any other scientist in their field of practice), can recognize it as real (cf. Abramson, Holbraad 2012: 39) installs a linguistically dominant humanity at the center of cosmogonic conceptualization at the expense of not only multiple millenary gestural-aural-visual semiotic modes of representing human experience, but ultimately at the cost of understanding how cultural semiosis and its primary instrument, symbols, functions.

Meaning, is a product of human sapience, the result of complex thinking processes that are not an a-priori deterministic trait of Homo sapiens, as the tradition of humanism, stretching back to the ideological powers of the Enlightenment would make it appear, but is itself merely a mechanism of psychological adaption to an analytically insurmountable experience, which is human existence itself. A process which Gregory Bateson coined as schismogenesis. It follows that "the fact that people think at all, that they are cultural beings who do things and effect changes in their surroundings, is due to the pronounced uncertainty, the relentless unclarity of their lives" (Drummond 1996: 54). If, thinking, the primary sense making tool at our disposal is the result of the inherently incomplete, shifting, changing, continuously adapting nature of our being, the conceptual tools it generates, such as language and other

artifacts, ritual forms etc. can not be absolute, on the contrary these necessarily would be processual (cf. *ibid.* 30 - 55). Thus the meaning of any symbol is derived only out of its usage context, should this change, then the meanings it conveys no longer appear current, so for example "few people eating croissants will be aware that they once signified the defeat of a people whose emblem was the crescent moon" (Layton 2006: 33). Many things lose the meaning initially attached to them at the moment of their creation. As artifacts migrate into different usage patterns their meaning becomes evident only through their relational bonds with their environment and in particular with the internalized experiences of the humans they come in contact with, which they simultaneously also influence (cf. Kienlin and Widura 2014: 34). Because symbols can only persist as long as they facilitate the exchange of information, and since information becomes meaningful only within the context of particular human experiences otherwise it is unintelligible, no matter its form, the precondition for symbolic exchange is a minimal degree of consensus between those who cohabit in a similar world-experience structure (cf. *ibid.* 2014: 33). If meaning is a byproduct of negotiated human experiences of the world at large and not a metaphysical property of words to be assigned randomly by individual human minds, then "the extent to which individual [perspectives] will overlap will vary according to the way knowledge is held and transmitted" (Layton 2014: 37). Conclusively, there are three prerequisites for the persistence of symbolic exchange and thus ultimately of culture:

- "1. It must generate behavior appropriate to the environment
2. It must make sense of experience
3. It must be mutually intelligible and transmissible" (cf. *ibid.*)

If information pertaining to the key parameters of human experience is exchanged through symbols and this exchange is enabling the adaptation of self-consciousness, which is prerequisite for further patterning of behavior, then the logical consequence of such a generative process is its own self-preservation which necessarily entails a self-realization of conceptual boundaries. Articulating experience in a symbolic form moves human consciousness into the realm of contrasts and comparisons, which facilitates the expression of difference and its structural opposite: sameness. The conscious internalization and externalization of experience based on the scale of difference and similitude is "the groundwork for the mobilization of group identities" (Appadurai 2008: 13).

In the next chapter I will continue to provide an overview of a phenomenon which presumes that individuals, so called reformers or prophets, can consciously and with intent direct the network of meaning that is culture towards a particular desired form. I shall then seek to demonstrate according to the model of culture as semiotic process described previously to what extent this presumption is true and how context dependent factors are key to understanding any anthropological query.

3.1. Cultural Revitalization

In the previous chapter I have demonstrated that the schismogenesis marking human existence is the catalyst for the emergence of complex thinking and thus implicitly for the production, distribution, reproduction and accumulation of meaning. Culture, as a network of interwoven meanings (cf. Geertz 2002: 46f) therefore, is by design a conceptual framework that enables people to share experiences in order to collectively solve different kinds of problems that face them in their environment by developing appropriate behavioral responses (cf. Malinowski 1944:36 in URL:18). Considering that human behavior is ends oriented (cf. Swidler 1986: 274) but people only have access to limited means to accomplish their desired tasks, Malinowski advises the researcher to carefully consider the observable differences between norms and action, between what people say they do and what they actually do (cf. Malinowski 1944:36 in URL:18). Rejecting the idea that culture imposes its structure on the individual by defining the goals to be achieved is a necessary step towards establishing its causal significance in shaping individual or collective strategies of action. Within the analytical framework of a means-ends governed behavior, analyzing culture in the form of abstract values that determine what people want and thus drive action, becomes futile, as there is no observable correlation between them, repeated case studies demonstrate that "people may share common aspirations, while remaining profoundly different in the way [...] culture organizes their overall pattern of behavior" (Swidler 1986: 275).

This is where symbols become crucial for a cultural analysis of any phenomenon. Culture is a byproduct of human conceptual and collective efforts to meet their needs in the face of the adversity of an analytically insurmountable environment. Therefore, operationally culture consists of interlinked and mutually dependent transactional relationships between individuals. These relationships are based on symbols and are networked together in more or less densely knit configurations. Thus, it follows that the more vital the task, the more cohesively organized and structured the actions become, which results in decreased tolerance

for deviation from the core symbolic forms that drive the continued exchange of information. Due to the inter-dependency of all the human and symbolic elements necessary in such an endeavor, the resulting configuration is for analytical purposes coined a social system. The goal of social systems is enabling persistent ways of ordering favorable action through time so as to ensure long term problem solving capacity. This conceptual order is what Ann Swidler calls, strategies of action (ibid: passim).

Following that human beings are just as much a products of the symbols they use as much as those who encode symbols in the first place, they are naturally constrained by their skill in mastering the logics of the particular symbolic form (music, craftsmanship, art, ritual etc.) they may be using to engage in acts of communication. Therefore, the presumption that culture is equally integrated and consistent and could uniformly shape the actions of people towards a value based goal is necessarily conspicuous. The cultural capacity of each individual is ultimately intrinsically tied to the various social systems it generates an informational feedback loop with. This implies on the one hand an immense potential for cultural diversification throughout all levels of social complexity, as each individual human within the same group has largely similar structural couplings to key social systems such as kinship, various material practices, on the other hand, the degree of integration and mastery of the symbols pertaining to these social systems differs immensely from individual to individual. Everyone lives in some form of coupling to the economy, which in its most basic form is a social system operating with the code of utilitarianism, but it would be erroneous to assume that everyone understands how the economy, especially within advanced market economies based on global financial flows truly operates. Nor does the majority of individuals understand the judicial nomenclature and the distinct patterns of behavior that are the basis of the legal system.

Conclusively, culture's causal significance in shaping strategies of action is indirect, it offers a repertoire of symbols from which individuals, defined by their particular position within the network can configure strategies of action to influence subsequent transactions to their advantage. Therefore, what enables or constraints the individual aren't collective, abstract values but the skills, habits, rituals, knowledge, sensibilities and any other symbolic forms that are at his disposal and which he masters well enough to bring into play efficiently and regularly (cf. ibid, 275ff; Gershon 2005:112; Layton 2014: 34; URL:18).

Culture as a distinctly process oriented phenomenon is therefore simultaneously the source for sustaining existing strategies of action as well as the very tool that is employed to construct new ones and overthrow the established regularity of patterned behavior that social systems actively pursue. Culture is thus both constraining and enabling human agency. How can this paradox be unraveled analytically?

In order to understand these causal connections between culture and action a conceptual distinction between stable social systems and periods of increased ideological activism and disrupted continuities in social agency is required.

The first instance of cultural generativity is governed by long lasting strategies of action, a very low discrepancy between experience and the symbolic forms used to explain it and a highly accurate problem solving capacity of the network as a whole. Due to these features, the individual agents are likely inclined to maintain and only gradually refine their 'tool kit' as to fit the gradual evolution of experience that comes with the passing of times and generational change. In such settled periods, people configure strategies of action as a result of habit, because culture is perceived as deeply meaningful and generally alleviates schismogenetic threats. Symbols in such periods are well adapted to make sense of experience, provide a coherent form of communication that requires little to no negotiation in terms of establishing their likely transported meanings, in short they become " 'common sense',[...] a set of assumptions so unselfconscious [...] as to seem an undeniable part of the structure of the world" (Swidler 1986: 279).

In settled culture, individuals rely on tried-and-true strategies of action (ibid.282) to maneuver the network of symbolic transactions they are part of. In short they are adhering to particular traditions. But as I shall demonstrate in the next paragraphs, traditions as much as they are a staple for cultural continuity do not guarantee successful behavioral patterns nor the desired permanence of any given status quo within the symbolic network.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings is their capacity to engage temporality "as not a succession of disconnected episodes, but a continuum extending to infinity in both directions, from eternity to eternity" (White 1949: 46). This mental disposition towards accumulation is key to understanding the choices available to people when configuring their possibilities for symbolic exchange. The experience of the present is always processed through symbols, these, however, by design transport the experiences of the past, therefore continuation and change are simultaneous processes incremental in conceptual

thought. Tradition, does not imply stagnation, is not an antonym for change, but an indispensable part of it, namely that, which entails those particular meanings that are transported through time, a characteristic that is traceable via etymology to the Latin root 'tradere' = to transmit (Glassie 1995: 396f).

Traditions offer both opportunities as well as risks for social systems, depending on the way they are performed. Vintilă Mihăilescu distinguishes between two modes of operating with temporal transmission of meanings, repetition and conservation. These are differentiated by the range of flexibility in configuring strategies of action they permit. Contemporary, secular society characterized by an institutionalization of knowledge and individualism refers to its past primarily with the intent to conserve. This point of view onto the past is one of distance wherein contemporary observers are separated from historical experience via a self imposed analytical, impartial point of observation (cf.Mihăilescu 2004: 187 in Iuga 2011: 17). However, due to the diversity of interests of contending groups and the unequal power granted to them by historical experience, conservation always implies selection with the intent of retrospective favorable revisionism. Traditions in such a mode are seen as a patchwork of symbols illustrative of the past, thus the reference points usually are outstanding feats and when dealing with artifacts, higher quality craftsmanship, degree of rarity or association with important celebrations or holidays, which usually demand additional ornamentation or specific complex symbolic encodings to be present on the items of clothing. Therefore one can conclude that traditions seen from a conservationist perspective will most of the time refer to the exclusive at the detriment of the quotidian, thus making their bias toward the representative and the elitist obvious.

People acting in a mode dominated by repetition, however, are embedded within a temporal loop stretching back into a mythic past what Mircea Eliade, calles the Great Time, which is both timeless as well as endlessly repeating (cf.Mader 2008:88). Eliade traces the characteristics of an existence within the Great Time to the perspective of archaic man whose life "has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is at the same time cosmic, since it has a transhuman structure (cf.URL: 19)." Transhumanism refers in this context explicitly to the divine, or that transcendental cosmogonic power that permeates the mental universe of *homo religiosus* on all levels, be it macro- or microcosmic, meaning it is found manifested both within man as well as everything that surrounds him, "in other words, he finds in himself the same sanctity that he recognizes in the cosmos (cf. *ibid.*)".

By acknowledging the source of creation to be other than himself, but at the same time part of himself "the perspective of religious man of the archaic societies is that *the world exists because it was created by the gods*" therefore his being in the world, his very existence and interaction with the elements in his surroundings is an act of communion. Therefore, "the existence of the world itself 'means' something, 'wants to say' something" and man is required to attune himself, oftentimes by undergoing lengthy ritualistic preparations. Heritage in this context is not a distant relic of a past in need of protection but a powerful tool to organize social life.

The peasant, or rural cosmos of Eastern Europe, is an example for such an existence in conjunction with Great Time. It is a mental universe, that to this day manages to embody within it a multilayered dependency on a ritualized life cycle, an existence open to the world, rich in ontologic diversity. Governed by age old folk traditions which skillfully still retain "a cosmic structure" originating in a considerable part from their pre-Christian religious heritage of early neolithic cultivators, which "represents a more archaic state of culture than that documented in the mythology of ancient Greece" (ibid). Enshrined in these systems of belief are notions about the nature of Good and Evil, ethics and morality, life and death, but also key elements of individual and collective identity, such as heritage, histories and very predominantly the relation to one's forebears. Traditions within such communities where a "rather cosmocentric view is shared [...] are organized according to a retrospective rationality that is based on the sacred order it assigns to the world" (Mihăilescu 2004: 187 in Iuga 2011: 17).

Tradition, can thus also lead to culture lag, an instance in which people "do not readily take advantage of new structural opportunities which would require them to abandon established ways of life [...] because they are reluctant to abandon familiar strategies of action for which they have the cultural equipment" (Swidler 1986:291). One such instance occurs when the material basis of a society undergoes change due to imported technological progress at a faster pace than the nonmaterial culture (cf. Freeburg, Workman 2009: 12). Societies where the emphasis lies on repetition of cosmogonic patterns are much more vulnerable to this phenomenon than others.

This demonstrates that the more densely individual experiences overlap, an unexpressed and unconscious faith in the accuracy and usefulness of the social system is manifest. People trust the meanings given to various experiences to be helpful for them as they are for their peers.

Since experiences are exclusive and unique, no culture will present homogeneity, even less so in settled cultural periods where the conscious mobilization of symbolic repertoires draw frequently on disparate and multiple modes of experience, therefore are not submitting to a unified pattern of action. This allows greater cultural diversity to be tolerated without endangering the core symbolic functions, which being fully invested with meaning blend imperceptibly into daily routines, in the guise of generally accepted assumptions about what is true or normative.

What motivates individual members of social systems to abandon inherited strategies of action and pursue the difficult task of constructing new ones, even when this necessarily implies adopting new symbolic forms, which then require a process of renegotiating their meanings.

Anthony Wallace, describes such intensive periods of cultural generativity, as revitalization movements and goes on to define them as "deliberate, conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to create a more satisfying culture" (Wallace 1956:265). Swidler argues that bursts of ideological activism challenging generally held assumptions within the symbolic network occur when alternate modes of organizing action are contending for dominance (cf. Swidler 1986:279).

However, in my opinion this explanation is insufficient in determining the shift from latent cultural competition that is observable in settled periods to radical reformulation of patterns of action through direct ideological discourse. Thus Swidler merely acknowledges the symptoms of a recurring conceptual error within culture, which under distinct circumstances manifests itself as an incapacity to make sense of synchronic human experience in light of the diachronic, as well as generate behavior appropriate to the environment.

Wallace distinguishes several sequential stages within the revitalizing process, describing the gradual failure of established patterns of action to efficiently satisfy the needs of people ultimately leading to the acute need for adopting new ways of ordering action and thus a reformulation of symbolic forms, the emergence of the revitalized culture.

The steady state is the first stage, here the status quo is maintained because for the vast majority of the population the various functions of the cultural system do not generate stress.

During the period of individual stress, tension rises as needs are not being satisfied.

High levels of individual and collective stress are causal for such a destabilizing effect within a cultural system. Stress is generated by a wide array of external as well as internal agents that diminish culture's capacity to provide answers to societal dilemmas and create meanings that relate to the existential problems of its members. External destabilizing agents are mostly categorized as environmental: climatic, floral and faunal change, major natural disasters, epidemics; and political: military defeat, political subordination and pressure toward acculturation to foreign powers due to conquest, imperial or colonial policy. Especially relevant destabilizing factor in the context of my own research in Bukovina, appears the problem of rapid liberalization within a weak configuration of state-society-market relations, marked by such problems as inadequate state policies, rising prices, the co-existence of 'enclaves' of affluence and deprivation, gentrification, the privatization and commercialization of public property and services as well as an overall lack of representation of citizen's interests (cf. Jacobsson 2015: 2).

Such factors also contribute towards the period of cultural distortion. In this stage we can observe internal cultural conflict, for instance disillusionment with the structure of the symbolic network, apathy towards problems of adaptation, ignorance towards the proper use of symbols and their meanings. The severity of internal destabilization is much higher than the external one as prolonged states of cultural disillusionment can lead to highly self destructive tendencies at the level of the individual, such as alcoholism, extreme passivity and indolence, ignorance of sexual mores and increased frequency of intragroup violence, which results in the gradual loss of societal cohesion, the symbolic network breaks apart as the patterns of exchange and their symbolic forms become incomprehensible. If not checked the ultimate end of such deterioration is in Wallace's words "the death of the society" (Wallace 1956: 269ff).

Such fears were being expressed at the turn of the previous century by the members of the Gaelic League, a cultural revivalist society in Ireland, when bemoaning the ignorance of the population towards important symbols, such as language and dress/clothing distinguishing Irish heritage in the context of tremendous economic and political pressure from Britain:

"The Irish-speaking districts are melting away with fatal rapidity, and it will take our utmost efforts to keep them from perishing altogether. And consider, too, how largely the prosperity of the country depends on the sentiment of nationality. The man who has the Irish language on his lips will also wish to have Irish clothes on his back, and will inevitably be led to turn

his mind to all that concerns the welfare of his country, whereas the English speaker will be looking towards England for his ideas and his material needs and the depopulation of the country by emigration which we all deplore is the final outcome." (O'Brien 1911 in. Ward 2014: 2002)

It is during such unsettled periods that culture becomes ripe for change, however, seeking alternative modes of conceptualizing experience or constructing new configurations of action increases even further the level of societal stress due to the latent fear that the substitute will be even less effective than the original.

Fortunately, the solutions most often lie embedded within the framework of the symbolic network itself, requiring merely perceptual acuity and mastery over the symbolic forms and their inherent logics so as to be able to generate new and adaptive permutations required to overcome conflicting situations. This happens during the period of active revitalization.

Within the revitalization period six major tasks occur: 1) reformulation, 2) external communication, 3) organization of followers, 4) adaptation to conflict, 5) cultural transformation, and 6) routinization of the new culture system. When this occurs, a new steady state emerges and lives gradually become settled again. Revitalizations can seek to revive traditional culture, they can seek to import a foreign cultural system, or they can seek a never before seen utopia.

The skill, wisdom, ingenuity and most importantly the willpower of the revitalizing entity, which Wallace ubiquitously names as prophet, are the key to the success or failure of any revitalizing effort. Due to the unsettled cultural context in which such ideological activism occurs a revitalizing entity must ensure a high degree of consistency within the new narrative, thus unlike the tolerance for plurality of parallel strategies of action that is characteristic for settled periods, a revitalizing movement offers but one unified answer to the question of how human beings should live. Thus the relationship of the partaking individuals with the revitalizing agent demands a higher degree of conscious commitment, cooperation and submission towards authority than the average embeddedness of individuals into the symbolic network required during settled periods (cf. Swidler 1986: 279).

Because revitalization can only occur gradually, as most ideological movements are not fully semiotically independent "in the sense that much of their taken-for-granted understanding of the world and many of their daily practices still depend on traditional patterns" (ibid: 279) the

leading figure must be able to distinguish early on which symbols are the ones that can become emotionally highly charged. Revitalization movements also have a high regulatory demand for routine and discipline over the daily habits of the members of a given society (cf. *ibid*, Wallace 1956: 274ff).

One such example is Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence, and particularly, the Indian peasant woman's spinning wheel, as the central unifying symbol of Gandhi's campaign for national struggle and liberation from British rule.

"Gandhi's campaign for the renewed production and use in dress of handspun [...] textile is testimony to the potentiality of cloth to unify large-scale societies. [...] khadi [...] challenged British rule and its arrogant imposition of sumptuary codes [...] through its ascetic imagery [it] dissolved the boundaries that divided Indian society. Distinctions [...] were overcome by a simple and colorless textile as Gandhi [...] summoned up the oldest and most humble traditions of the subcontinent." (Schneider & Werner 1989: 19)

Why cloth is such a potent symbolic form and its particularities in relation to many societal functions I shall elaborate in the next chapter.

3.2 The cultures of cloth

"Man is born naked but dies and is put away with his clothes on" (H. and M. Hiler 1939: xiii)

"Clothing makes culture material in diverse and illuminating ways" (McCracken 1987: 109)

In the previous chapter I have provided an ample analysis of the intricate relationship between individuals and society, which is grounded in patterns of sharing meaning. I have demonstrated that culture depends on symbols because these constitute the mechanism that allows humans to process and exchange meaning, which in turn is vital for humans to iterate themselves as sapient entities.

One of the key symbolic means of giving form to the conceptual categories of existence that emerge from the human mind's interaction with the environment and perhaps also the most resilient one is cloth, especially while taking the form of clothing and adornment.

Why does cloth bear such a significance as a means of communication and categorization? This is perhaps due to the centrality of cloth to identity forging processes that individuals undergo in their journey of socialization.

Continuing Lee Drummond's argument, that thinking is an emergent process caused by the very incompleteness of human existence, the first cornerstone that each human being must first reach within their semiotic path of self iteration is what I call a coming to terms with their body. Looking at infants the first years are spent getting acquainted with the many bodily functions, their scope and limits. Understanding one's body-mind framework and even more importantly integrating it within a social framework of operation nevertheless is a lifetime work.

The body itself, comprises an entire array of aesthetically describable qualities such as color, texture, shape, odor and dimension all of which are invested with symbolic potentiality and interpretability, are categories which as the individual ages, change, thus shifting the social status of an individual and implicitly their options for public display as well. Therefore, any aesthetic response the body may generate also carries messages of social and psychological significance which are fully outside of the control of the individual (cf. Bubolz Eicher; Roach 1979: 7ff). Consequentially, the premise of any disposition towards identity rests at the juncture between "socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands" (Simmel 1957: 542), which offers a modicum of explanation as to why personal adornment is characteristic of all societies, while forms of protective clothing are not. Cloth functions as an expressive means of individual and collective communication within human societies. The need towards classification and indication of a person's status within a human collectives appears ubiquitous while protection towards the elements and other adverse environmental conditions are very circumstantial and limited, thus "there are regions where one would expect to find protective garments, for example the freezing regions of Tierra del Fuego, but where such items are absent" (Schwarz 1979: 25). This suggests that the symbolic functions of cloth derived from its wide range of forms such as coloring, patterning, texture, size and last but not least quality of workmanship, give it an almost limitless potential for communication.

The dialectic relationship between the material properties of cloth and social categories generates a multitude of analogies with particularities of human life, such as its life cycle. The more attributes cloth is attributed the further its interpretative potency is increased.

Cloth is a symbol that can indicate a person's sex, age, occupation, position in a social or spiritual hierarchy but also functions as a tool to conceal or reject such categories. Thus personal adornment can both symbolically tie a community together, as much as its rejection

can signify unequal distribution of power, oppression, fragmentation and/or the breakdown of customary patterns of organizing action as well as the failure of ritual to effect order.

"Clothing plays its diachronic role variously. [...] clothing is sometimes a confirmation of change and sometimes an initiation of change. It is sometimes a means of constituting the nature and terms of political conflict and sometimes a means of creating consensus. It is sometimes an instrument of attempted domination and sometimes an armory of resistance and protest." (McCracken 1987: 109)

Whatever, the implications such choices may have, the central dimensionality shaping any symbolic statement made through clothing remains fixed on the axis of representing distance. Be it social distance or temporal distance, clothing always positions the wearer in a relational dynamic to "social order, [to] what is and what should be" or in contexts such of revitalization, to utopian projections of an ideal past or future, thus, appropriate to the needs of a community, integrating or segregating, legitimizing or delegitimizing members (cf. Schwarz 1979: 29, Schneider, Weiner 1989: 1ff).

Grant McCracken recognizes the heightened symbolism of clothing within the context of rituals, where it can take on extensive functions regulating the performance of the attendants. It can mark different roles, indicate the condition of persons not only in relation to each other but to past and future potentialities as well, establish the desired mood i.e. black clothing signifying mourning at a funeral etc. and most importantly it distinguishes between the sacred and the profane. The expressive potentiality of clothing as a means of communication is undeniable, yet as McCracken accurately points out, clothing should not be equated to language, as the semiotic tradition inherited from Levi-Strauss suggests because "clothing does not possess a combinatorial freedom and [...] it is therefore incapable of creating new messages" (McCracken 1987: 120). Unlike language the code of clothing is almost fully constrained on the one hand by the range of ideas it can communicate, these being limited to broad assertions about cultural principles and processes, on the other by the semiotic load of the context of its creation and that of its consumption. One of the factors that complicate the task of interpreting clothing is its integrative symbolic form. The expressive properties of clothing become obvious when analyzing it as one symbolic unit, even though it consists of many diverse elements, the interpreter of clothing does not make judgments based on the syntagmatic relation of its constitutive elements to each other, but is seeking meaning within the whole look. McCracken concludes that "the interpreter of clothing examines an outfit not for a new message but for an old one fixed by convention"(ibid. 117). Due to this lack of

combinatorial flexibility, clothing is a more conservative symbol, providing society with a fixed set of messages that encourage repetition rather than innovation. Furthermore, clothing transports much of its semiotic load from the context of its creation, thus enabling a much more intense relation to historic circumstances, practices of memory and tradition than language does. Its interpretation, therefore, necessarily involves a information "beyond that provided by the clothing itself" (Schwarz 1979: 33) and should thus include "all the important messages or codes that are transmitted [...] within the community of its creator [while paying special attention to how] the meanings foreseen by the creator of an object are 'eclipsed' by the ones given by the person who is using, preserving, or assimilating the object" (Iuga 2016: 38).

Bogatyrev demonstrates in his analysis of Moravian folk costume that clothing functions as a public display of "all the fundamental axes according to which this world was ordered" while ensuring its relatively unaltered continuation from generation to generation (cf. McCracken 1987: 105f; 120).

"Bogatyrev, in his early study of Moravian folk costume, demonstrates the number and range of cultural categories that may be discerned and investigated through the study of clothing. [...] Moravian folk costume is treated as a collection of material 'systems of difference' which encode a collection of parallel conceptual 'systems of difference'. Thus, for example, the age-grade discrimination of the Moravians (a system of differences which discriminates categories of person by the differential distribution of clothing colour, shape, fabric and so on). Other categories of person, as defined by rank, sex, marital status, occupation and so on, are also evident in Moravian clothing which thus serves to give them material representation in the social world." (McCracken 1987: 105)

We can infer from his analysis that an accurate interpretation of the messages communicated by the Moravian folk dress would have been rendered fruitless had he not attained insider knowledge, information which pertains to a wide range of social, political and religious contexts characteristic of a particular community of people, to establish correlations between the material expressive forms, color, patterns, motifs and categories pertaining to the classification of individuals based on attributes of the body, such as in this case, their age. The dual layers of meaning attached to traditional clothing becomes in this example apparent. People use clothing that embeds within it codes, shapes and meaning that are common to an entire social group, therefore clothing takes on a communitarian function. This necessarily implies that each community has its own particularities concerning material culture, which

sets it apart from those characterizing other communities. It follows, then that clothes assure continued differentiation between members of different communities (cf.Iuga 2016: 39).

This aspect of marking clearly differentiation and belonging through the use of clothing has also proven to be a central concern for my own informants during my own field research in Bukovina, where I oftentimes heard people emphasizing that "a peasant who goes to the market and meets another peasant knows where he or she comes from, just by looking at his or her garments" (ibid). I found it particularly difficult to follow the exact symbolic markers of differentiation that signified communal belonging during my field stay because the displayed variation in form is refined to such a high degree of subtlety that the knowledge to read and understand details within the general design patterns of the regional traditional dress is reserved exclusively to insiders.

The work of Daniel Miller, hereby is proven to be of utmost importance to the setup of any research concerning clothing, because he clarifies the dimensions such research should take by pointing out that the meaning of clothes can only be given by the people who produce and wear them (cf.Miller 2005: 10).

In the next chapter I shall investigate the ways in which, on the one hand, the context of production of cloth and clothing infers meaning to the objects created and on the other creates the potentiality for people to create strategies of action that enforce communitarian, collective modes of cultural generativity. I shall then investigate how capitalist production and its associated patterns of action altered inherited traditional symbolic expression of cloth and thus challenged its continuing role in the reproduction of social life.

3.2.1. Handcrafts and community

"A handcrafted object evokes the aura of human tradition, the sweat and skill of its individual maker, and since craftsmanship avoids the repetitive precision of a stamping machine - uniqueness and originality." (Waterbury 1989: 245)

Objects that are made completely by hand or by using traditional tools in accordance to inherited techniques of creating them are categorized as belonging to [artisanal] handcrafts.

Handcrafts as a form of work is rooted in the rural, peasant household industry of ancient times and oftentimes draws upon this centenary tradition to legitimize its claim towards value and most importantly authenticity. Historically, handcrafts were therefore traditionally

associated with rural and village settings. As far back as the 19th century when such a differentiation was employed to mark objects created outside of the industrial process. Craft production thus displays strict boundaries of place and time, being associated with a specific group of people residing within a specific location (cf. Buis et al. 2014: 2). Therefore objects resulting from handcraft are expected to be indicative of the relationships existing between place and producer. Although even to this day most handcraft is produced by people who have occupied the same geographic territory for centuries, handcrafts and especially dress, are being employed by displaced people all over the world to evoke the homeland and a sense of belonging or to re-create their community symbolically (cf. *ibid.*, Iuga 2016: 42). Thus the strict geographic connotations of place are from a contemporary analytic perspective anachronistic as far as the forces of globalized flows of people and goods allow former traditional communities to plan and organize deterritorialized spaces and places for collective agency mediated by technology. The emphasis should therefore focus on the capacity of traditional production techniques to facilitate dialogues about belonging, repetition of customs, cooperation and ultimately control over self-representation. A central question in such studies therefore should be "whether changes or alterations in the relationship between craft and community arose organically within the community itself or operated as a response to external influences and pressures that shaped priorities into material forms" (Buis et al. 2014: 4).

Taking a closer look at the millenary history of cloth production as well as the resulting usage of clothing, a multitude of associations, links and metaphors with the interconnectedness of human life, nature and spirituality become evident (Schneider, Weiner 1989: 2ff).

"Beliefs about apotropaic and symbolic properties of substances applied to or worn on the body probably began before humans learned to manipulate textiles. [...] permanent scarring, tattooing or temporary paint and dyes to the skin offered protection against unseen, malevolent forces, [...] with the development of textiles, such cosmetic amulets moved to cloth." (Welters 1999: 7)

Magical thinking is argued to be the earliest forms of conceptualizing the world and relies on a dual separation of phenomena as either beneficial or harmful, while aiming to facilitate rituals designed to bring about desirable events or to ward off and prevent afflictions and ailments.

Ronald Schwarz argues that "belief in the power of supernatural forces to cause illness, death, and pregnancy, is as common as the use of adornment. Spirits to which these powers are attributed to are often associated with natural phenomena"(Schwarz 1979: 25). Anthropological and archeological evidence demonstrates that the cosmology of early Neolithic farmers around the world, but even more so in Europe, revolved around the natural world - sun, moon, star, earth, sky, water and trees - the properties of which were associated with stages and functions of the human life cycle. Thus themes such as fecundity, fertility and reproduction, tied to crops and animals but also affecting humans are seen as interconnected in the magico-religious practices of agricultural communities. The wide range of works by Marija Gimbutas, who, having excavated in the region, unearthed pottery and clay figurines adorned with the exact same motifs, markings, ornamentation and patterns as are found on folk garb today, thus attesting to the continuity of symbolic usage within the Carpathian basin of Bukovina, Moldavia and southern Ukraine, from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic and further down history to contemporary times (cf. Gimbutas: *Language of the Goddess* 1989: passim; *Civilization of the Goddess* 1991: passim).

This conceptual categorizations allowed for the development of systems of practices designed to facilitate the transfer of properties or substance from one element to the other, irrespective of the actual physical qualities displayed. Thus in agricultural societies "the placement on the body of garments associated with fertility is particularly revealing, as it concerns the belief in the positive outcomes resulting from the contact of cloth with the body. For example, belts and sashes decorated with fertility motifs gird the waist and abdomen, only inches away from female reproductive organs, while headdresses accentuate a woman's hair before marriage, advertising her availability and supplementing the potency of her own hair" (Schwarz 1979: 25).

The peasant linen shirt in Bukovina, which is the main focus of my research, shares similarities with other southern European folk dress, especially in regards to the investiture of supernatural powers into it. Generally, garments made from natural fibers that directly touch the skin are considered to be particularly infused with apotropaic power, capacity for shielding the wearer from harm, equally significant is the manner in which textiles drape and move with the rhythms of the body, which enables the formulation of entirely new and distinct categories of classification based on analogies between functional properties of the material and context specific ritualized meaning.

Such beliefs in the interchangeability of regenerative or degenerative properties across a wide spectrum of material carriers be it animate beings, inanimate objects or supernatural powers not only establish categories of usage, such as cloth destined for very specific purposes like Eastern European bridal attire, which custom dictates can be worn only once in a lifetime, but regulate human agency via a strict application of rules of conduct governed by proscriptions and taboos.



Figure 14: Hand embroidered cloths used to outline ritual space during festivities dedicated to the patron saints of the village of Ciocănești, Bukovina (13.Aug.2016)

Because not only human beings can be the beneficiaries of properties attributed to various substances and materials, but vice versa too, the manipulation of cloth is highly restrictive and strictly regulated in many traditional societies (cf. Schneider, Weiner 1989: 8ff; Schwarz 1979: 25f; Welters 1999: 7ff).

Historically, there is a common tendency in small scale societies which adhere to a magico-religious cosmology to enforce a series of regulations on the production of its material culture, especially on textile and cloth manipulation, designed to minimize any risks of pollution of the material by negative properties it may adopt from contact with certain groups of people. Thus for example, in many societies anthropologists distinguish "taboos that exclude menstruating women from weaving as well as dyeing, and forbid sexually active or pregnant women from seeing or handling the loom"(Schneider, Weiner 1989: 9).

Due to the assumed regenerative properties of cloth, its production process in traditionally spiritual communities involves the summoning of the spirits of ancestors , or divinities which are expected to consecrate the raw material, the techniques and eventually the resulting clothing. These rituals and offerings that are part of the production process also function as a means to ensure communitarianism and collaboration within the community. Thus traditional

handcraft labor organization usually involves the entire community into the production process, which allows the identification of a number of recurrent characteristics that define handcrafts as a distinct mode of labor.

The first and foremost of these characteristics is the direct association of all or most production stages with a clearly identifiable community living and working together in a clearly identifiable space-time context. This indicates that the production stages are not outsourced and there is an overview over who takes part at what stage in the handcraft process. Such a mutual dependency also plays a crucial role in the control over the raw materials. These are traditionally locally sourced and processed. Historically, an entire village would contribute to the production of folk crafts either by sourcing the raw materials, by harvesting, skinning, mining etc. or by being directly involved in the crafting of the artifacts [for a more detailed description of the historical model for communitarian labor process as they were documented at the turn of the last century in villages from Bukowina, see Chapter 5 of this paper].

Today, due to changes incurred through the advent of mechanic production and capitalist economic interests, the selection of materials plays an increasingly dominant role as a distinguishing factor for handcrafts.

Spinning and weaving were the first handcrafts to be affected by the forces of industrialization in Europe. The standardization that mechanical reproduction enforced paired with the increasing market pressures to streamline and cheapen labor and material costs, disenchanted the cloth craft making. Incapable of competing with merchants and entrepreneurs putting out industrially processed raw materials cloth makers in Europe and elsewhere were pressured into applying their skills as wagedworkers within a framework that strictly divided the stages of manufacture thus essentially turning what used to be a collective endeavor into a fragmented competition based labor force. Therefore cloth makers lost the monopoly on production oversight to burgeoning entrepreneurs, who, ironically, often were members of their own village communities.

"The peasant [...] for centuries [...] has been accustomed to 'doing everything himself', to spinning his yarn, to weaving his cloth and sewing his clothes in the home. But by the turn of the [20th] century [...] the mountain farmer had become a businessman under the cultural influence of the city. Perhaps he rides on his bicycle, to haggle with the buyers, wearing not the traditional peasant garb, but an urban style of dress he has purchased in the town, the cut

of which is, if not in the latest fashion from Paris or Vienna, then in the last season's." (Houze 2015: 15)

The success of the early capitalist putting out systems is largely due also to the fact that the peasant communities, compelled by poverty, but without sufficient understanding of market value, sold their labor cheaply (cf. Waterbury 1989: 246). The incapacity of the peasant women, traditional cloth makers to assess their product in terms of monetary value is also confirmed by Erich Kolbenhayer in turn of the century Bukovina. He states:

"The fact that in the preparation of such work [traditional cloth & clothing] the eventual sale of the same is never thought and these items are to serve only the need and the decoration of the own home, or of the own person, comes out in particular through the unaccountability of the farmer over the value of these items [...] she can not value the time and effort of her own labor.[translation from German original by myself]" (Kolbenhayer 1912: 13)

Because in most traditional societies cloth making was attributed in large part to women, the following exploitation within early capitalistic systems can not be analytically disengaged from the aspect of gender. Having lost the control over sourcing of materials women could no longer claim an elevated status by upholding sacred rituals to infuse their cloths with spiritual value. Being required to weave and spin according to unfamiliar patterns, women could no longer choose age old inherited symbols and thus could no longer perpetuate analogies between fertility, reproduction and production.

Lastly, "by encouraging the growth of fashion - a consumption system of high-velocity turnover and endless, ever-changing variation - capitalist entrepreneurs vastly inflated dress and adornment as a domain for expression through cloth" (cf. Schneider, Weiner 1989: 4).

These changes had long lasting effects also on another very important aspect applied in determining the conceptualization of handcrafts, namely authenticity. Authenticity is a property of artifacts and individuals or entire communities that is socially, historically, culturally, politically and lastly economically constructed and is a result of multiple parties negotiating a set of characteristics that determine the spatio-temporal situation of the subjects they apply to. In societies adhering to a magico-religious world view based on a system of repetition that links the present to a distant mythic past through the continuity of material and immaterial practices of a community, the authenticity of handcrafts and particularly of cloth would be evaluated based on its function within distinct ritual cycles, as well as by its capacity to store information about the cultural categories central for the identity of

individuals of a group. Furthermore, the biography of the people reflected onto the objects, thus spiritual leaders would be able to transform certain objects into sacramental artifacts. With the advent of the industrial revolution, capitalism and modernity the previous dominant world view of a cosmic order that imposed a framework for human agency began to give way to increasing individualism, a perspective that sought to place human beings at the center of existence, autonomous entities that shaped reality according to their internal, intrinsic qualities rather than vice versa, them being a product of social and environmental contexts. This mode of conceptualization became extrapolated to the entirety of the material world, thus artifacts were being scrutinized according to increasingly scientific, measurable scales that sought to verify the authenticity of objects based on their observable materiality alone (cf. Crăciun 2014: 10ff, 23f). These transformations also shifted the attention of the consumers of cloth away from its social or ritual function, towards "fiber, fabric, pattern, form, cut, trimming, and bobbling. They are interested in the durability, frailty, delicateness, density, brightness, shininess, smoothness, roughness, busyness, ruggedness, coldness, and warmth of fabrics"(ibid: 145).

This generated new challenges for people and communities with a long tradition of handcraft production and required them to develop strategies to verify and assure the recognition of their products as authentic in a fast paced globalized market economy. Thus, the making of craft became an increasingly political activity as communities of practitioners engage with deterritorialized flows of people, commodities, ideas and finances that shape the technologically determined landscape of the infrastructure of globalization, which is, among others, characterized by the establishment of a global intellectual property regime built up on "large and complex repertoires of [image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality] in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed [and] out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (Appadurai 2008: 35). Faced with the unshackled flow of traditional symbolic knowledge once entrusted to the tight control of a select few and its voracious consumption within an economy driven by the semiotic power of fantasy and imagination whose main product is ordinary people's projects of self-articulation and self-representation, people engaged in the production of handcrafts find themselves creating hybrid, often subversive modes of value generation. Adopting modern forms of quality assurance based on the materiality of objects craft makers from the Navajo, to Scotland "work toward educating consumers about the production of the weaving or introduce a

copyrighted trademark to identify the objects [...] by the quality of the weave [and the material properties of the] cloth as mass produced [...] cloth" (Buis et al 2014: 3). Concern for the necessity of such a task I found to be echoed in the cities and villages of Bukovina:

"Those who do not know what handcraft quality is can't recognize it and thus buy for themselves silly things." (Lommer Eleonora)

Craft makers today, increasingly rely on the historic heritage of practice and community identity to legitimize their claim of expertise. Thus the fusing of capitalist entrepreneurialism to ethno-preneurialism as described by John and Jean Comaroff in their work *Ethnicity, Inc* (2009) becomes highlighted in the self-aware and self-directed commercial practice handcraft communities engage in today and which often are pushed by circumstance to incorporate their historic, social and/or spiritual heritage into the marketing campaigns used to authorize the authenticity of their produce. Therefore, in an ironic twist of history, forces emerging out of industrial societies such as the Bohemian subculture, or the American counterculture movement of the 1960s and its contemporary offshoots, with their increased demand to wear clothes that are not-mass produced offer communities of handcraft practitioners the unique opportunity to revitalize the analogies that were traditionally invested in cloth and textile production concerning the continuity with the past, the stages of life and other sacred qualities and in doing so revitalize strategies of action that are engendered in accord to such conceptual categories (cf. Appadurai 2008: 31f, Buis et al 2014: 2ff, Comarff 2009: 138ff, Crăciun 2014: 12f, Schneider, Weiner 1989: 24f, Waterbury 1989: 245).

Personal adornment is used in varying ways across cultures as a way to project a distinct personal image and in doing so represent the relation between the self and the community and share it with others. Today this means of symbolic communication is increasingly embedded into the system of fashion and therefore is affected by the forces that determine what fashion is as well as its function as social signifier.

In the next chapter I shall present an overview of these deterministic factors and will explain the conceptual boundaries within which fashion structures human action. Furthermore, I shall investigate how a nuanced analysis of kitsch, as a distinctly aesthetic product of the fashion system, can conjure up new venues of addressing both the dangers and the opportunities handcrafts revitalization movements face today.

3.2.2. Fashion and Kitsch

„Call it fashion, costume, or dress, what we wear and how we decorate ourselves tells the world who we are, even in less-than-fashionable circumstances“ (Mendes 2001: 49 in. Müller 2003: 7).

"Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another." (Simmel 1957: 541)

Georg Simmel was one of the main forerunners of sociological research into the phenomenon of fashion. According to him fashion is a form of social relationship that allows people to engage with their peers based on two divergent principles: conformity, manifested in the actions of individuals through the element of imitation, or separation, which is represented by the reclusiveness of individuals, by the need towards isolation. This opposite duality lends fashion a paradoxical character, as a symbolic means of communication it simultaneously is a power of social equalization as well as a power of segregation and exclusion (cf. Simmel 1957: 541f). How does this play itself out? In order to unravel the paradox of fashion it must first be established what exactly constitutes fashion. Unlike popular belief, fashion does not restrict its sway only over clothing and adornment but is a means of symbolic communication that modulates all features of social life according to its own dual code, thus fashion "can [...] absorb any chosen content: any given form of clothing, of art, of conduct, of opinion may become fashionable" (Simmel 1957: 557).

For the research purpose of this thesis, the phenomenon of fashion shall henceforth be analyzed in relation only to garments. Nevertheless, the principles of fashion I shall elaborate in the next paragraphs apply to it notwithstanding its the chosen form.

There are three core dimensions that determine fashion: the first is time, fashion is principally marked by a high degree of sartorial transitoriness. Time is a central aspect of fashion because it is one of its measures, for Simmel fashion can exist only in the form of a short lived, temporary phenomenon at the thresh hold of expansion, assimilation and dissolution. In order for fashion to exist the threat of replacement, of becoming obsolete must be a continuous presence in relation to fashion communities must position themselves. This introduces the second operational necessity of the fashion system, namely the social dimension. Fashion is an exceedingly social enterprise, it exists only in the form of collective agency directed towards either the objective of union with those of the same class or

subgroup or towards the segregation and exclusion of all others. As a style of clothing propagates itself and becomes adopted by more people which extend outside the immediate social group that originated the particular style, it loses its intensity as a distinctive symbolic form capable of suggesting categoric difference. The closer fashion comes to reaching its economic goal, namely mass, large scale adoption, the closer it gets to its own annihilation as a unique symbolic form. Therefore, at the core of fashion lies a functional paradox which threatens its existence but at the same time maintains the necessary stimulus for its propagation across time. Each time a certain style reaches the event horizon of dissolution in mass consumption, a novel form or style of clothing needs to be introduced to propagate anew the dualities of innovation and imitation, social separation and inclusion (cf. Müller 2003: 4f, 21; Simmel 1957: 544-546). This constant pressure towards novel forms profoundly and most unexpectedly shapes the third dimension of fashion, namely its relation to the material standards of life and upon which it should rely, but, in fact does not. Simmel explains that "in the case of fashion there is a complete separation [between] the material justification for an action and its general adoption" which otherwise are expected to overlap and determine each other, and attribute this unique feature to the fact that fashion is only concerned with shaping "formal social motivations" because these are much easier to influence and also have far shorter periods of alteration than major shifts in the fundamental material patterns that govern aspects of life, such as modes of production, reproduction and environmental factors (cf. *ibid*).

Furthermore, Simmel argues that the cyclic patterns of adoption and dissolution of fashion style can reach peak transitory states only in civilized societies, which he posits are at the opposite developmental stage than 'primitive' ones. These latter ones are much more resistant to the transitory lifestyle imposed by fashion due to their inherent conservative tendency.

"This is certainly one of the reasons why primitive conditions of life favor a correspondingly infrequent change of fashions. The savage is afraid of strange appearances; the difficulties and dangers that beset his career cause him to scent danger in anything new which he does not understand and which he cannot assign to a familiar category". (Simmel 1957: 546)

Adapting Simmel's accurate observation to a contemporary scientific vernacular which does not differentiate societies and culture according to stages of evolution but according to the permeability and accessibility of symbolic structures that create options for strategies of action, I can affirm that obedience to the dictates of fashion is more likely to manifest in

settled cultural periods, where the conceptual categories of life, determined by the symbolic network, are perceived as common sense, rather than in unsettled periods, where these categories are often questioned, open to subversion and where established personal or collective identities are increasingly disjointed, ineffective in providing material and spiritual security which often leads them to become inclined towards malignant forms such as neuroticism, paranoia etc. This in turn creates the need for people to learn new ways of organizing and practicing unfamiliar habits and behaviors, which is where fashion finds fertile ground for replication due to the centrality of the need towards differentiation that is prevalent in times like this (cf. *ibid*; Swidler 1986: 278ff; Wallace 1956: 269ff).

Because of the strong existential pressures exerted on it, fashion is constantly required to negotiate its persistence within the symbolic network that is culture, its principal concern, therefore, is regulating change (cf. Simmel 1957:557). This in turn conditions the categories of life fashion circumscribes, which generally tend to be reserved to superficialities that bare little influence on the primary forms of organizing human action rooted in the subjectivity of the individual experience and in the material forms of life (cf. *ibid* 545).

For Simmel, the transitory character of fashion remains its essence because it enables it to elevate its material forms to transhistorical significance. Being acutely concerned with change, fashion repeatedly returns to old forms, in this particular case, of clothing, but the same applies to any of its expressive vehicles, in order to supply the symbolic means for the dual cycle of imitation and differentiation to continue.

"As soon as an earlier fashion has partially been forgotten there is no reason why it should not be allowed to return to favor and why the charm of difference, which constitutes its very essence, should not be permitted to exercise an influence similar to that which it exerted conversely some time before." (*ibid*: 557)

The relation of fashion to the material history of dress or other artifacts is not arbitrary but follows critical observations about the delicate relationship between wear and tear as distinct features of objects according to which patina is negotiated. Patina, a concept first introduced by Grant McCracken is "a general term [which] deal[s] with that property of goods by which their age becomes a key index of their high status" (Appadurai 2008: 75). In order to understand the bond between patina and fashion it is, however, crucial to avoid narrowing the analytic focus on examining any object based only on its biography in terms of history, it must include the social context.

"Here, as in many other matters involving material life, context is everything. The distinction between an heirloom and junk is not patina as such, but also the successful semiotic management of the social context." (ibid.: 76)

Taking into consideration the complex set of links to other objects, spaces and the people "who know how to indicate, through their bodily practices, their relationships to these objects" is crucial for being able to distinguish the short lived moment a fashion trend is active and even more importantly, in identifying the property of fashionable, *distingué* wear, or age, in artifacts (cf. ibid.: 75).

Simmel argues that:

"the reason why even aesthetically impossible styles seem *distingué*, elegant, and artistically tolerable when affected by persons who carry them to the extreme, is that the persons who do this are generally the most elegant and pay the greatest attention to their personal appearance, so that under any circumstances we would get the impression of something *distingué* and aesthetically cultivated." (Simmel 1957: 544)

What does this imply?

First, it demonstrates that age alone is not the property that allows clothing to become fashionable after periods of disinterest and desuetude. The aged character that clothes acquire through repeated usage across a period of time is a very delicate property that requires considerable maintenance, to shield it from falling into disrepair and decrepitude, which naturally incurs a high resource costs, therefore, in most cases patina is a feature in most cases reserved to be cultivated by members of the elite, upper classes, or aristocracy in a society. Patina, however, is much more than a material property of objects, for its proper effect is intrinsically tied to a very distinct emotional reaction coupled with the irreversible effects of the passing of time, namely nostalgia (cf. Appadurai 2008: 75).

A compound neologism originating with the expatriated Germans living in late 17th century Switzerland, in particular with a medical student by the name of Johannes Hofer, who provides an account for the composition of his newly coined term when writing:

"Nor in truth, deliberating on a name, did a more suitable one occur to me, defining the thing to be explained, more concisely than the word *Nostalgias*, Greek in origin and indeed composed of two sounds, the one of which is *Nostos*, return to the native land; the other *Algos*, signifies suffering or grief; so that thus far it is possible from the force of the sound

Nostalgia to define the sad mood originating from the desire to return to one's native land." (Hofer 1934: 380-81 in. Boyer 2006: 364)

Initially intended to be a medical term encompassing the physiological symptoms associated with prolonged feelings of homesickness, it exists with great effect as a vernacular term describing the psycho-somatic effects incurred by individuals through the deprivation of social contacts and implicit social estrangement, especially when resulting from trauma caused by temporal flow (cf Boyer 2006: 364). Therefore, the condition of being nostalgic, is intrinsically preordained by the shape and magnitude of the temporal flux affecting certain people at any given moment. The passage of time indicates social transformations and imminent change. As a double-edged sword, the passage of time threatens the way certain people lived, yet it also emphasizes their special status in relation to the changes incurred in their lifestyle. Hofer suggested in his seventeenth century original publication that the epidemiology of nostalgia evokes the phenomenology of dislocatedness (cf. *ibid.*: 366). Therefore, nostalgia is best described as the "subtly embodied anguish of those who can legitimately bemoan the loss of a way of life (Appadurai 2008: 76)." Well cultivated and preserved patina, is a material credential for the special relationship of its owners as belonging to an exclusive social category of people who have attained a nostalgic posture through their historical experience of loss, linking them to a way of living now gone forever. This aspect of loss, is crucial in asserting the value of patina and is what makes it "a truly scarce resource", it is also the seal of guarantee against impostors and parvenus who might seek to legitimate their claims of upward social mobility or membership to exclusive social groups via imitation and mimicry (*ibid.*).

"Naturally, good impostors may seek to mimic this nostalgic posture as well, but here both performances and reviews are a more tightly regulated affair. It is harder to pretend to have lost something than it is to actually do so or to claim to have found it. Here, material wear cannot disguise social rupture." (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, according to Simmel, imitation of the material life of exclusive social groups, even if unsuccessful, is a cornerstone of the fashion cycle.

According to him, a fashion trend is first conceived and adopted by people at the top strata of society, who confident in the stability of their social structures, can easily afford to experiment with peripheral forms of self representation. Due to the impulse towards upward social mobility that governs the actions of those in the lower strata, the newly emerged style becomes gradually adopted by ever wider segments of society. This distribution model, first

described by Thorstein Veblen in 1899 as a trickle-down movement originating at the top of the social hierarchy, is animated by people's wish to identify with the affluent and the latter's counter reaction of distancing themselves from the former. Once a fashion trend becomes adopted on a large scale, the originators, the wealthy and powerful, reject it for another.

Second it proves that fashion is primarily a marker of identifying personhood and individual identity, even though its existential prerequisite is the collective, communal, the public masses, which leads me to the main point of critique towards Simmel's description of the fashion system as a whole.

In the 20th century, mass produced garments and synthetic fibers made fashion styles previously only reserved to the affluent, due to high material and production costs, accessible to the majority thus equalizing the opportunity of every person to engage in the generative processes of fashion, and craft representative and distinctive styles of dress and decoration unimpaired by the social context in which they are embedded. Rarity is one of the key factors of differentiation related to dress. The general historical tendency links rarity with luxury hand-made items created in labor intensive processes, crafted from imported or hard to obtain materials. As such, for example silk garments during the early medieval period in Europe indicated aristocratic status due to the extreme rarity of the material they were produced from. Modern mechanic production, globalized trade and industrial farming output as well as the increasing incomes of the middle class throughout the second half of the 20th century, heavily shifted the value of garments away from the raw materials they were made from towards other indicators of worth and rarity. This also changed the patterns of fashion distribution, with the elites no longer having the advantage of exclusivity over luxury goods, rarity would be sought after in the uniqueness of styles. This often implied that designers would start looking for increasingly eccentric, exotic types of dress, thus shifting their attention ever more towards social groups with little or no representation in the mainstream mediascapes. Consequently, many popular fashion styles were introduced and popularized by savvy designers who took inspiration from the humblest of origins. The ubiquitous blue jeans, today a global identifier of the urban middle class consumer, is also widely featured in high gloss luxury lifestyle magazines and finds itself on the runway shows of the most prestigious labels distributed to the affluent elites, originated in the North American plains, where it was the simple working dress of humble cowboys and gold miners. Similarly, the worn out, torn up and unkempt clothing styles of people pertaining to Punk groups, also was adopted by designers and marketed throughout the 1990s as part of expensive labels (cf. Mueller 2003:

17). Such practices are often a cause of conflict especially if the sources of inspiration are elements of traditional clothing or garments whose symbolism is deeply tied to claims of ethnic, religious or national identity of large communities of people. One such case caused much debate and concern with members of the 'Semne Cusute' community but also affiliate groups such as 'La blouse roumaine' while also providing them ample evidence to substantiate their claims of furthering the protection of the material cultural heritage from Romania. The case involves renowned fashion designer Tory Burch, CEO of Tory Burch LLC., listed by Forbes Magazine in 2015 as the 73rd most powerful woman in the world, who misrepresented the original source for a coat design featured in her "Resort 2018" collection, as being of African inspiration, while in fact it was an identical copy of a Romanian traditional festive coat (cf.URL: 20).



Figure 15: Print Screen of original Fashionisers.com Tory Burch post

The misappropriation took little time to be discovered as such by internet savvy Romanian bloggers who although being part of different communities working towards the revitalization of the Romanian traditional dress, cooperated and shared resources in order to track down the original source of Tory Burch's merchandize.



Figure 16: Tory Burch vs. Romanian traditional coat

The design was tracked to a traditional Romanian sheep skin coat from the Tismana workshops dated to the early 20th century, which has been exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art since it was donated to the museum in 1981 (cf. URL: 20).

Following the discovery and the outrage strongly voiced by thousands of members of the "Semne Cusute" and "La blouse roumaine" communities, who crowded the social media channels of the Tory Burch label making their disheartened and enraged opinions noted via the hashtag campaign #givecredit. Wrongful appropriation, theft and cultural insensitivity were just some of the accusations the campaigners brought against the designer, arguing that Resort 2018 violated the collective intellectual property rights of Romanians. One of the key arguments in favor of their position was related to the strong imbalance of power between the internationally renowned designer and the unrepresented, disenfranchised originators of the traditional designs, namely the village craftsmen in Tismana, whom Tory Burch completely

erased from the account of the creation of her collection by making the initial false statement of African origins.

On the 12th June 2017, the #givecredit boycott campaign with its thousands of supporters had a first breakthrough with their demands, forcing Tory Burch to issue the following press release acknowledging the error:

"Resort 2018 is about the unique friendship between two inspiring women, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Princess Elizabeth of Toro. Both were style icons, global travelers, and art lovers. In our effort to summarize the collection, we missed a reference to a beautiful Romanian coat which inspired one of the pieces. Whether it's Romania, Uganda, or France, we are a brand that strives to celebrate, honor, and be inclusive of women from all countries and cultures, in the broadest way possible." (Tory Burch official statement. in Romania Insider available online at: URL: 20)

However, the truly important effect of the #givecredit campaign lies within the framework of the burgeoning cultural revitalization movements in Romania but also globally, because it has allowed people to start to reformulate their habitual strategies of action. It made them realize that "to fit into a [globalized] consumer economy, especially an economy in which social identity is almost wholly mediated through processes of commodification, 'ethnicity must [itself] become a commodity" (Comaroff 2009: 150). In short, cases such as Tory Burch, but also Christian Dior's "Pre Fall 2017" collection, attracted the attention of the Romanian mass audience to the previously taken for granted and undervalued symbolic and aesthetic potency of the traditional, folk dress as well as the missed business opportunities it provided. The main driving sentiment behind this realization was in a sense ironic, after all it took the misappropriation by foreigners, for many Romanians to reconsider the worth of the folk dress, both as a commodity, as a symbol for personal, collective, or even national identity.

"It's a pity that it took a foreigner from France to discover our heritage, while we had it under our noses all this time and never sought to valorize it. We only recognized the merit of his idea afterwards and decided to copy. But why? Why does it always take others, foreigners to come and discover our valuable heritage only for us to follow their example? It's either lack of will or I don't know [...] but I trust that the Romanian people isn't that narrow minded to not be able to notice this." (Lina Jucan)

However, as powerfully representative it may be, the *Ie* is also extremely vulnerable to theft, fraudulent depiction and being turned into kitsch due to usage without proper context, lack of

understanding of its material and symbolic principles and being subjected to the whims of a global fashion industry that requires the exotic, the rare, the marginalized to sustain itself, ultimately at the cost of the disenfranchised peoples it imitates (cf. *ibid.*, Appadurai 2008: 73ff, Ionescu 2017: *passim*, Mueller 2003: 17, Tănăsescu in: Musat 2017: *passim*).

It is reasonable therefore to say that fashion, today, moves in hybrid forms that can not be explained solely by a top-down model. The trickle across theory claims that fashion adoption runs a horizontal course between and across social groups and that individuals look for inspirations according to their own personal preferences and possibilities rather than according to class or group distinctions. People increasingly take their fashion and style cues from the individualistic creations of unique yet assertive personalities they encounter, who do not necessarily belong to their social group or class. Furthermore, due to the effects of digital communications and the interconnectedness of the global mediascapes, access to branded content is no longer restricted to the financially affluent but is available to a global audience. With the rise of individual fashion mobility came the rise of style and fashion influencers. Targets for imitation are people who manage to be assertive enough with their personal choices balancing uniqueness with accessibility in forms that, however, are always meticulously knit together to represent superior quality, at the very least when compared to the habitual dress used as the point of origin of a particular style. Due to these shifts, designers now create looks which they market at consumer groups ready to pay prices ranging from the high end to lower end ready-to-wear. Ultimately, the pace of fashion adoption today is vastly accelerated to the time Simmel made his observations (cf. Bubolz Eicher, Roach 1979: 12ff; Mueller 2003: 13ff). This increased frequency of change coupled with the unshackled affirmation of raw creativity and expressivity typical for the modern condition "confront[s] individuals with unprecedented choices in consumer goods, ethical outlooks and life plans, [thus] undermin[ing] the security of conventional life with the promise of creative freedom - the freedom to choose oneself through one's own taste expressions - with all the risk and danger this freedom invokes." (Binkley 2000: 135) For many people, however, the resulting condition of these disruptive, fast paced, and oftentimes unpredictable practices that emerged as the dominant forces for social advancement during the twentieth century, is an intense feeling of disembeddedness from culture. The lack of semiotic and ontologic security that would be provided, would collective symbolic means of communication, such as fashion be bracketed by repetitive and reassuring traditions and habits, is the driving force behind the thriving taste for kitsch we experience today.

"I will argue, in short, that kitsch, which glories in its embeddedness in routines, its faithfulness to conventions, and its rootedness in the modest cadence of daily life, works to re-embed its consumers, to replenish stocks of ontological security, and to shore up a sense of cosmic coherence in an unstable world of challenge, innovation and creativity.

Particularly where kitsch makes its most aggressive demands on our aesthetic sensibilities, in its appeals to sentiment, kitsch aims to re-embed its consumers on the 'deepest' personal level. Precisely by deflecting the creative, the innovative and the uncertain, kitsch advances the repetitive, the secure and the comfortable, supplying the reassurance that what is to come will resemble what has gone before, that the hazards of innovation and uncertainty are far away, and that one is safe and secure in the routines of an unadventurous genre. "(Binkley 2000: 135ff)

What exactly is kitsch? And why does it have so many detractors and theoretical critics while enjoying such popularity with consumer choices?

The term entered the vernacular in late 19th century Germany originally coined by the art critics and experts in Munich, it was used in an exclusively derivative manner to "define an aesthetically impoverished object of shoddy production meant more to identify the consumer with a newly acquired (and badly managed) class status than to invoke a genuine aesthetic response."(ibid: 137)

Since its inception, the term was steeped in cultural elitism as its derogatory power rested firmly embedded into a mode of thinking that preconceived society into hierarchies of taste aligned with hierarchies of class and financial power. Thus it was mainly used to criticize the aesthetic choices of bourgeois consumers indulging in the repetitive imitations of both the decorum of the old aristocracy and its own art forms, which emphasized the joys of the daily experience of nature and life, as best exemplified by Romantic art. As social theory advanced the theories concerning this phenomenon gradually shifted away from the fears of mass culture theorists of a depletion of creativity through mass produced goods when it became apparent that the accelerated consumer habits were not devoid of sensibility and personal agency, but on the contrary where giving increased numbers of people the possibilities to convey their identity and instill meaning into the goods they acquire. Therefore, kitsch shouldn't be perceived as semiotically impoverished, but in fact as a cultural form that continually attempts to revitalize those symbolic elements of a culture that have normative power and are considered to be common sense. Thus kitsch is in terms of the cultural definition presented in the previous chapter, a strategy of action that relies on the 'tried and

true' meanings integrated into the core of the symbolic network. By affirming sentimentality over analysis, the kitsch aesthetic seeks to

reassure its consumer that his experience of the world is correct and truthful as it overlaps with the experiences of his peers united in the conventionality of the symbols that make culture possible. Since the goal of culture is to alleviate schismogenetic threats, the goal of kitsch, albeit in a range of experience that is exclusively bound to the aesthetic, as a device that reaffirms the validity of culture, necessarily must be the same (cf. ibidi: passim). Conclusively, kitsch, is not a threat towards the creative potentiality and quality of a particular people, but the truest affirmation of their merit. "Kitsch's repetitive style reaches out to a humanity whose fundamental essence is imitative [...] inviting us [...] to take our place in the rhythm and cadence of familiar time and familiar forms." (ibid.: 142)

Clement Greenberg accurately notes the "pre-condition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully formed cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends"(Greenberg 1939: 40). The production and consumption of kitsch, therefore, finds itself in the opposition of several cultural agents who, due to their assumed roles within the symbolic network, benefit from their challenge towards popular culture and tradition, as well as from the promotion of the disembedded singular individual, capable of rising above the collectively shared experiences that compose culture and attain cosmic importance as a role model (Binkley 2000: 141f). Subsequently, any revitalizing agent, or prophet in the sense attributed by Wallace, will find himself confronting the consumption of kitsch directly, as part of his efforts to introduce a new and revised set of symbols into the network. Furthermore, due to the fundamentally elitist nature of any revitalization movement, at least during its most formative and assertive period, when conformity to the symbolic forms presented by the revitalizing entity is paramount should the movement succeed in asserting its claims, a clash with the antielitist availability of an aesthetic that deflects the intellectualism, introspection and abstraction of any singular form and reinforces the security of the common, the quotidian and the sentimental, is unavoidable. This clash has proven itself to be of core concern during my own fieldwork, as my observations and discussions with the members of the Semne Cusute group repeatedly referenced the ambiguous threat of kitsch as an existential problem for the continuation of the cultural tradition of the folk dress in Bukowina. Ironically, however, as I shall present in Chapter Six, the growing consumption of so called kitsch folk dress, presents a convincing argument that partly counters one of the key claims of the movement, namely the

discontinuation of the production of folk dress in Bukowina and the possibility of the extinction of this particular handcraft. I shall address the distinction between the kitsch as a cultural strategy of repetition and the theoretical position that presents kitsch as failed imitation more in detail in Chapter Six with illustrative examples from my own research output.

4. Methods

Concerning methodological questions, anthropology has established participant observation as its trademark. Deciphering foreign ways of life and the concrete modes world views are being enacted, not abstract speculations, is the goal of any anthropological study, therefore gaining direct access to the people and the places pertaining to the groups and phenomena under scrutiny is of key importance (cf.Knorr 2011: 9).

Most scholars advise the fieldworker towards the following: firstly, assuring that one is able to actively participate in a broad spectrum of customary activities which implicitly requires overcoming one's personal comfort zone. Furthermore, it is important to avoid the pitfall of methodological myopia, meaning it is imperative to adapt one's approach and research design to the conditions encountered in the field. For example classic anthropological fieldwork scenarios involving traditional rural contexts allow continuous immersion into social life and long term presence in the field. Research within industrial and urban contexts would fall short if it were to rely wholly on participant observation, mainly due to the very fragmented and discontinuous nature of most fieldwork in such contexts. This applies very well to research within organizations where the site itself is difficult to pinpoint as it is continuously shifting, forming and then braking apart at various different locations according to distinct logic. Such ambiguity and discontinuity necessarily require the researcher to compliment his observations with various other techniques such as structured and semi-structured interviews and critical analysis of documented materials, files, forum posts, online conversations, photographs and other such artifacts (cf.Eriksen 2001: 24-29).

4.1 Constructing the field

„[...] as disciplinary boundaries dissolve and more and more overlap occurs between disciplines, anthropology has responded in part by reestablishing its own borders and reasserting what makes it unique from other disciplines. Fieldwork, one of the central enduring symbols of that which defines anthropological work, seems to be the target of this effort.” (Caputo 2000:21)

One of the first and most important concepts a student of cultural and social anthropology encounters is that of field research. The field and its exploration are those identity-creating elements which are repeatedly appropriated or reproduced by the anthropological community for themselves as an exclusive feature. This idea requires a closer study of this human and socio-scientific field of investigation as a concept, as well as a physical, temporal and local instance.

The question of what distinguishes anthropology from all other humanities and social sciences, a question that must be answered and clarified several times over as an anthropologist, whether while still in training or as a practitioner, becomes more intense when negotiating the many constitutive parts of what fieldwork is and their impact not only on the data but most importantly on the self-awareness and positioning of the researcher, thus:

“[...] in this composite but familiar portrait, ‘fieldwork’ involves travel away, preferably to a distant locale where the ethnographer will immerse him/herself in personal face-to-face relationships with a variety of natives over an extended period of time.”(Vered Amit 2001: 2)

Going into the field, spending a certain amount of time there, with more or less strong isolation from home, from acquaintances and family, and participating in the daily life of the "natives" are the key data of the anthropological activity and, according to Vered Amit whether a report can be accepted as "anthropological" or not (cf.Amit 2000:1). If this information is often enough to convince a layman to excite young undergraduates for the subject, they still contain much ambiguous and outdated assumptions and ultimately only confuse the approaches, practices in the anthropological community and, at the same time, expectations towards its subject matter. Fortunately, these complex problems have been subjected to an internal critical examination, which has led to many debates, innumerable proposals for a reconceptualization or chronological / historical adaptation to the 21st century, hopefully, at some point in the near future, a new unified argumentation grid for such positioning questions to develop. Until that comes, I'd like to work out my own questions, ambiguities and insights that I recalled as part of my own 38 day fieldwork experience for this thesis.

The first and, in my opinion, most dangerous feature of common descriptions of anthropological work is that it is concerned with the interpretation of the "stranger" of the "unknown", as if anthropologists are actually a kind of mystic, fortune teller and connoisseur

of the arcane, ie basic eccentrics dealing with the eccentric. This characterization, which often enough, is extremely problematic because it has an exoticising effect and, secondly, because it renews the lengthy colonial legacy of the subject. This involuntarily brings to life an antiquated picture of the discipline by pointing out that the world continues to consist of an oppositional set of worldviews. In the process, what is known is equated with homeland, closeness and is unquestioned or taken for granted; on the other hand, the strangeness that can be found elsewhere, just as "when ethnology [...] concerned itself primarily with the ways of life of those with whom nobody else [within the established scientific community] had any interest in (Knorr 2011: 17) ".

I would like to prove how strong and dominant this idea is in the self-perception of the anthropological community with the following quotes. These come from anthropologists whose work and activities come from two temporally and spatially separate worlds. The first an established representative of the US American-British tradition of the last decades, the second a young German ethnologist whose scientific career is only at the start.

„Thus anthropological conventions regarding the selection of fieldwork sites have first insisted on cultural, social and spatial distance as a gauge of ethnographic authenticity but then measured the craft of anthropology through the capacity of its practitioners to render the distant familiar. **The nearby** is assumed not to require this alchemy and **is thus treated as ethnographically unproblematic.**”[emphasis by myself] (Vered Amit 2001:4)

“Das Besondere an den von der Ethnologie entwickelten Begriffen, Konzepten und Modellen ist, dass sie zumeist in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Unvertrauten, dem von den heimischen, gewohnten Lebenswelten radikal Verschiedenen, entstanden und nach wie vor entstehen. [...] Die zunächst als fremd und anders Erscheinenden zu verstehen, ist somit nicht nur ein Kernanliegen des ethnologischen Projekts, sondern gleichzeitig mit das größte Kapital der Ethnologie.“(Knorr 2011: 21)

In addition to the already mentioned exoticising factor, these ideas have a particularly negative effect on the expectations and ideas of students. On the one hand, it can often be intimidating for colleagues who want to study the "ordinary" at home. A striking example of this is provided by Virginia Caputo in her essay "At home and away", where she points to the latent discrimination against unconventionally planned study projects within "domestic contexts" by the anthropological academia. Second, it can lead to extreme simplification of field research expectations themselves. What is the difference between a longer journey and field research, or when exactly does the field research begin. This complete ambiguity leads

to the question "When am I doing anthropological fieldwork?" And culminates in the absurdity of the following answer: "When I am there and doing nothing else" (Vered Amit 2001: 5)." In my opinion, that question is one that can only receive a highly subjective answer, which I will refer to later in my work.

In regards to the basic problems that these inherited tendencies raise, however, I would like to clarify some things. In relation to the above-quoted German author, but with a fundamental conceptual difference, I reject the dichotomy familiar vs foreign. For me this dilemma shouldn't be of import considering that the main goal of ethnology is to explain the lived complexity of a particular world view in its conceptual and material form. To provide insight and understanding into the particularities of lived experience and practice, to expose the multiple levels of interconnected systems of symbolic communication and attempt to align them with their corresponding categories of interpretation, in simple terms, figure out the relation between the actions of people and the various contexts in which these become in one way or another meaningful and how that is absolutely situationally dependant (cf. Geertz 1973: 6ff).

One could of course, as Phillip Descola also clearly illustrates, argue that this explanatory purpose is by no means a characteristic of anthropology, as, at least since Durkheim it has been an integral part of sociology, social psychology and even economics (Descola 2005: 66). Nevertheless, in my opinion, it remains the fundamental trait that characterizes anthropology in its peculiarity, namely, that the main aim is to establish the meaning behind the actions, the thinking, the feelings, any human activity, using the hermeneutic tools while striving to maintain a perspective that is internal to the people we describe. In this respect, at least for me, the nature of anthropological cognition is a kind of common learning that involves the occurrence of "a knowledge that is, strictly speaking, not replicable, since it derives from an intersubjective exchange" (Descola 2005: 69) ". Contrary to the general expectation, however, that anthropologists' output should be a structured reproduction of this internal, or emic, perspective, the knowledge that results from anthropological analysis is not emic. Nor can it be, because, if we seriously analyze the emergence of such data and the realization that "the researcher and his / her personal relationships serve as primary vehicles for eliciting findings and insight" (Amit 2000: 2) is unavoidable. In that respect I can say that the veiled presence of the researcher in the anthropological text production as a secondary voice injecting epistemological clarification where needed in the flow of a description that should

represent the 'point of view of the native' living practice (see Amit 2000: 3). Field research is an immediate personal experience based on a mental construct, the field.

„[The field] has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. [...] This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the [...] resources available to the ethnographer. Seen from this perspective, an idea of fieldwork in which the ethnographer is expected to break from his/her usual involvements in order to immerse him/herself in the 'field' of others' involvements is an oxymoron. Instead, as the chapters in this volume illustrate, the construction of an ethnographic field involves efforts to accommodate and interweave sets of relationships and engagements developed in one context with those arising in another.” (Vered Amit 2000: 6)

What is wonderfully expressed in this quote is that the institutionalized urge for scientific distance is fundamentally incompatible with our discipline. Secondly, it proves that "ethnological objects do not require a geographic-bounded territory to define them (but, in terms of the global interconnectedness in which they are embedded, each ethnography today is one suspended in the world-system and one of the world-system itself (Knorr 2011: 26))." The power of an anthropological study, therefore, is that it ultimately involves a close-up, detailed, microscopic study of a cultural phenomena in embedded in multiple contexts that strives to uncover the systems of meaning that emerge out of these contexts and the particular strategies of social interaction they may or may not enable. As a researcher going in the field, one is therefore by default conscripted in a multi-sited venture.

This aspect has proven of heightened centrality in my own practice since the inception of my thesis and its research outlook, as I shall explain further.

In the summer of 2015 I attended a workshop for traditional Romanian weaving techniques in an art gallery in Vienna and met Ms. Ioana Corduneanu - its organizer, and the founder of the 'Semne Cusute' blog. She dedicates herself to the revitalization of the Romanian textile crafting heritage by means of education, practice, popularization, but also commodification. The members of the Semne Cusute group teach themselves the old crafting techniques based on vintage examples collected from archives, ethnographic accounts and museum collections from all over Romania, but also from abroad, with a particular focus on the *Ia*, the traditional blouse worn by the rural population in the past. Wearing the blouse helps to construct their identity as individuals, as a community, and to commodify it as a national brand, which is to

symbolize Romanian identity internationally. Ironically, in my initial discussion with Ms. Corduneanu I was made aware of the fact that many of the models she references in her work were collected a hundred years ago, by an Austrian engineer, Erich Kolbenheyer, in an ethnographically detailed account *Motive der Hausindustriellen Stickerei in der Bukowina*. This observation demonstrated to me the fluidity of anthropological knowledge within the networks of global cultural flows as proposed by Arjun Appadurai (2008) and made me more acutely aware of my own position within them, especially of what were cultural dimensions that I simply took for granted. I was facing a classic situation of being caught up with the force of a neglected past, as I was left explaining to my peers how a Romanian anthropology student in Vienna would not be able to share any insight into this topic whatsoever. Upon reflecting on my own ignorance in the matter of the material culture of Romania, particularly the textiles, the reasoning of Ms. Corduneanu who was leading the talks, as to why she initiated the project: namely, that she feared young generations of Romanians would lose touch with their heritage due to the many other distractions within the global mediascape they are exposed, not only made sense, but it resonated completely with my own experiences. The textile heritage of Romania was never a topic of discussion in any of the social settings I was frequenting as a young person, nor was it present in any of the institutionalized forms of education I attended and I couldn't recall any of the major media networks broaching the subject. The accounts Ms. Corduneanu shared with us of a community of thousands of Romanians joining together in online chat forums, on social media, organizing a vibrant grassroots campaign of disseminating information, having a civic impact but most importantly of a widespread awareness and interest in the Romanian peasant blouse throughout all social strata seemed unreal because they were conflicting with my memories. I immediately decided such a massive cultural phenomenon needed further investigation. Analyzing the organization structure of the movement, spread across the country in mainly urban centers while at the same time understanding that any study of cultural revitalization would necessarily employ forms of ethnohistory in order to clarify questions of provenance, tradition and historic change, therefore requiring information from the original context of the cultural form under investigation, in this case Romanian rural countryside, the methodological framework soon became apparent.

The field research was conducted over the period of month from the 24th of July to the 30th of August 2016.

The first phase, approximately 10 days, consisted of attending the regular meetings of the "Semne Cusute" groups in two major cities, Bucharest the capital and Brasov, my former childhood hometown, where I also had my residence. In this phase I also established further contacts with the groups in Bukovina, secured transportation means and organized much of the logistical aspects of my journey north, such as residence in Piatra Neamț, Vatra Dornei and Câmpulung Moldovenesc the three main cities that host active Semne Cusute groups with regular meetings. The fourth city that had an active group, Suceava, I had to cancel from my plan due to not being able to establish contact with the local responsible organizer of the group.

The second phase of my fieldwork, lasted about three weeks, and involved repeated travels between the above mentioned three cities and the many nearby small villages and monasteries in order to meet contacts, seek out traditional craftsmen still practicing their trade, visiting small regional museums and looking at their collections, trying to track down rural "sezatori" and attending various cultural and religious events such as the Day of the Trout in the village of Ciocănești, a local festival that attracts large crowds and offered an opportunity to make important observation regarding the cultural economy of the Bukovinean embroideries or the Day of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, a high holiday in Orthodox Christianity, which provided good insight into the symbolism of the Ia and its spiritual and identity determining capacities.

In order to understand the Semne Cusute movement, its many diverse social and cultural strategies and the networks of meaning it is embedded into I would have to treat it as a case study and thus not focus on deciphering its structures or its intended ideology, but to look at the daily routines of actual people engaging in social practice, competing for limited resources and recognition in the framework of a reinterpretation of established rules and norms (cf. Rössler 2003: 144). My aim was to be skeptical about the cohesion of the movement and to compare and contrast the practices, in particular the weekly held "Sezatori" workshop style meetings, supposedly modeled after ancient rural traditions, where the members meetup, teach themselves the old crafting techniques, sew together, engage in communal activities, showcase their latest creations etc. of various branches to each other as well as to attempt, if possible, to compare them to a rural "Sezatoare", should any still exist. Under these circumstances, my object of investigation being mobile, situated in different and multiple locations that are structurally, geographically and temporally divided; are embedded within complex technological constructs such as online chat rooms, and social media forums,

the only viable methodological approach is multi-sited ethnography. The forte of this approach lies with its tendency to favor comparative analysis of ethnographic data gathered from disparate fields and create conceptual relations between them which are then treated as systems of meaning and verified for logical consistency (cf. Halbmayer 2014).

Furthermore, my object of study is itself a potent catalyst of structural and semiotic change within culture, thus encompassing a high potential for conflict, crises and instability. To untangle this network of superimposed meanings I complement my methodology with Gluckman's situational analysis that focuses on conflict:

"Gluckman hit on the idea of scrutinizing particular situations of conflict as complexes of connected incidents that are occurring in the field, in order to isolate and identify the actual mechanisms underlying the development of the conflict" (Evens, Handelman 2006: 2).

In a context where symbolic expression is internalized and appropriated by various groups of people for apparent similar reasons but in practice with very different outcomes and with very different strategies such as the case of the traditional embroidery in Bukovina, being able to accurately pinpoint the conflicting potentialities and trace them back to their historic and/or operational root cause is incremental. This is made possible only through thick description, though the narrative puzzle of establishing systems of relation and reference between the different instances of symbolic interpretation that constitute the observed phenomena. Therefore, the only possible way of establishing the semiotic blueprint for this revitalization movement is by pinpointing its analytical, theoretical and ideological assumptions and describing the processes of exchange, delineation, dominance, submission and alteration that exist between them and are internalized by the people who enact them through their speech, their behavior, their affects etc. The expertise of the ethnographer thus is measured by two sets of skills, his ability to gather data efficiently and his combinatorial proficiency in establishing symbolic categories and relations.

Fortunately, the methodological toolkit at our disposal offers a wide range of techniques that enable us to do so, which I shall present in the following chapter.

4.2. Data collection methods

Working on this project showed me that "fieldwork demands an immense amount of flexibility that makes method less consistent, and consistent methodology bad methodology" (Moeran 2009: 151).

The classic anthropological method that provides the researcher with sufficiently extensive data to be able to formulate thick descriptions is participant observation. Characterized by an intensive involvement with the social group one decides to study over a longer period of time with the intent to make systematic and detailed notes describing the events, behaviors, artifacts and the social setting of the field (cf. Bauer 2014:33f). Acquiring a very high level of detail in the description requires the anthropologist not only to be present and reach out with his senses to what surrounds him, but to actively deploy a wide range of techniques that pertain to the routines of the observed group, oftentimes these being techniques outside of the field of expertise of the anthropologist. Therefore, participant observation as its name suggests involves learning to do things just as the people we work with in the field do them, thus it is more than a perceptive method, it is a mnemonic, experience based method of learning. Obviously participant observation also involves having good people skills, knowing how to appear non-judgemental while categorizing the informants in primary and secondary groups, ie. figuring out who would be ideally suited for follow up qualitative interviews or who were the persons who had the most knowledge on a particular topic I was interested in and who were people with less insight into the processes of the community, and perhaps the most important aspect is knowing how to trigger a snowball effect in order to get new leads, contacts and thus access to new otherwise closed off spaces of social interaction. (cf. Bauer 2014: 34). This latter skill proved crucial for my entire research plan, as my mobility from one subsidiary branch to another in different cities throughout Bukowina was only made possible via personal recommendations by leading figures of previously visited groups. Due to the sporadic meeting schedule of the various groups this city hopping, traveling anthropologist approach to my field, was absolutely vital, given that I could not simply wait for two or three weeks in a single city for a group to reconvene again, since I had a total of 31 days at my disposal.

- Key points of focus in my observation were: describing the location of the meetings: where?, how many attend? at what time do they meet? spatial organization during the meeting, do people sew together or individually?, are the meetings in private spaces or public spaces? what artefacts are present?
- describing the relations between the people: what are the motivations for attending? what is their relation to the Ia? who are the people with authority tasked with leading/organizing the workshops? who is teaching them? general observations on the

age, gender, class composition of the groups? who gets selected to present their work at the various public showings the community hosts/organizes throughout the year? how does that affect the prestige within the group? what is the level of engagement, who takes more initiative and how? topics of discussion?

- describing the material culture, especially the Ia and materials directly related to it: important markers of classification: old / new (handmade vs industrial printing)? questions of quality, authenticity and “other symbolic dimensions”? what materials, quality / origin? availability of materials? teaching/reference materials? any other elements of material culture that are not directly related to the Ia but are present? what is the clothing of the participants, how are they themselves dressed?

I complemented my observations with extended online "lurking". A 'lurker' is a person who joins an online forum or community as a member, has access to all the multi-media content published in that forum, can download but doesn't actively contribute to any of the discussions in any way at all so as not to disclose his presence to the other members (cf. Knorr 2011: 109). Obviously at least one person always was informed of my presence in a particular forum at any given time, namely the main administrator of said forum, which was typically either Ms. Corduneanu herself, the founder of the blog and unofficial leader of the community or the organizers of the various 'Semne Cusute' local groups from the cities I visited. This online presence provided me with very important data to the way different topics are handled within the community that contrasted with the physical meetings, which I could only attend after having preannounced my visit, thus obviously having the attendees being informed of my presence beforehand. Thus every single "sezatoare" I attended was at the same time a collective informal interview as I could speak to and address questions to the entire group or depending on the situation just simply listen to the myriad conversations the ladies, and yes this is a very important detail, as all the meetings I attended consisted exclusively of women, were having and simply intervene with questions as I saw fit, thus:

"In my case, informal interviews are considered as meetings with people that were prepared for a talk about my research. They were informed about my field of interest and directly contacted in advance. I used to take notes instantly, did not tape the conversation, asked questions without help of the questionnaire, and was acting as a researcher. Informal meetings instead are considered as meetings with people I did not know before I actually talked to them (Bauer 2014:32)."

I relied on informal meetings as the main method while I was looking for craftsmen in the villages surrounding Câmpulung Moldovenesc, my last pitstop in my journey. As far as snowballing proved perfect to get contacts easily within the Semne Cusute community, I had

no success with it in the rural context whatsoever, due to many contributing factors that shall be explained further in the thesis. Having to rely on mostly word of mouth and hearsay, and a local government issues brochure on registered craftsmen my search for old practitioners of the textile crafts in the villages of Bukovina progressed with much difficulty and after several rejections of contact and quite frankly curiously distant and cold reactions from the locals, I stopped revealing my identity as a researcher, nor did I take any notes or recordings during the meetings with villagers, but proceeded to do so at a later stage, mostly evening upon return to my place of residence.

Formal qualitative data I got from conducting five one and a half to two hour episodic interview and one approximately two hour narrative interview, from reading museum displays and conducting archival and library research locally.

Furthermore, I also extensively used photography as a documentary means throughout my fieldwork.

Upon return to Vienna, I began the process of analyzing my data that "unfolded [in] two general phases - while after the first research period I only concentrated on transcribing the interviews, digitalizing my fieldwork diary, arranging primary and secondary data, and doing some pre-analysis of the gathered data in order to decide how to go forward, the actual data analysis was started after the second research period"(Bauer 2014:39).

The key themes and points of analysis of my paper that resulted from my data analysis are summarized in these leading questions:

How is the "Semne Cusute" community balancing its proposed goal of fostering textile literacy with the public and its economic aspect? and what are differences between the capital and the province?

What are the activities of "Semne Cusute"?

What are the public strategies the members of "Semne Cusute" employ in their ideological dissemination?

What differentiates an authentic Ia from a counterfeit one, a "Chinese Kitsch" one?

Who, how and why attaches value to the Ia and how does that differ between the various social groups?

When informants keep reemphasizing the multigenerational time-crossing property of their Ia, which transposes the histories of long time deceased ancestors with each new iteration, can one detect certain latent shamanistic principles. Does the Ia, similarly to shamanic costume represent a highly ontological tool providing certain people at certain times the capacity to crosscut the boundaries between human and nonhuman beings such as the spirits of one's ancestors? Or is an old Ia with proven multi-generational ownership, valuable to urban women across Romania because it contains an efficiently managed *patina* as a temporally specific value enhancing property of fashion?

Another fascinating characteristic of the movement is its symbiotic relationship with the economic productive life of its members, namely work. This became obvious due to the falsification of my pre-field work assumption that doing fieldwork in August would allow a greater availability of a wider segment of the group members. In fact it turns out that the members of the group perceive holidays as reprieve both from their actual work as well as the 'Semne Cusute' engagement. This suggests that the activities within the 'Semne Cusute' group also function as a therapeutic balance towards the pressures of an increasingly accelerated workload in Romania today.

4.3.The role of the researcher

The onset of research mandated by the personal position of the anthropologist within the structures of global anthropological discourses and academe, unavoidably reflects on our presence in the field and establishes structures of relations that effect reactions of all those involved. Following, it is of utmost importance to be aware of the fact that anthropologists are not the only ones who learn during fieldwork, their subjects do that as well.

How do our 'research subjects' adapt to the intrusions of an anthropological investigation? The interaction informant-researcher is not an unresponsive activity, one party will always respond to the knowledge, the information, the available resources of the other, ie learn, learn new things and thus pile up in tandem multiple interpretation variants of the facts, each succeeding, informed by and altering a previous iteration of the interpretative act. Thus, Judith Oakley's requirement for her colleagues to work more autobiographically is a particularly important milestone in the subject. Concerning the variety of possible positions the researcher can have in the thicket of research and thematic fields, Claude Levi - Strauss says the following:

"Each of us is a kind of crossroads on which different things happen. The intersection itself is completely passive; something happens on it. "(Levi-Strauss 1980 in: Mader 2008: 9)

An interesting statement, but at the same time wholly idealistic, as all who participate in the process of research planning today can confirm. Levi-Strauss' metaphor, is ideally suited to represent the practice of ethnography because, on the one hand, this demonstrates that ethnography arises ad hoc and if given sufficient time with the interest group one can systematically uncover the internal logics of the symbolic system that informs their cultural practices simply by the means of long term and repeated exposure and the resulting comparison of observations.

Realistically, unfortunately, such a research style is made impossible by the fact that it can only work under an extreme temporal investment. This is a luxury in the 21st century. Because of this, many critical decisions that shape the process and ultimately the results of a field research are made in a preparatory phase, the purpose of which is to continuously narrow down, adapt and alter the research expectations in a realistic manner to match the available resources. In other words contemporary anthropologists are required to construct and reconstruct their field numerous times and in short succession to adapt and succeed.

Traveling back "home" is an emotional experience to anyone. The dimensional shift in social positioning in this case, however, as I set out to conduct my field work in Romania, as a Romanian expat from Austria, completely absorbed and conscious of my role as a researcher, did certainly complicate a number of experiences I went through. First of all part of my fieldtrip involved intermittent stays at my childhood home in the city of Brasov, due to financial and practical reasons. This decision, while offering pragmatic advantages, such as the 100% certainty of having an assured "base of operations", cost reduction and definitely higher comfort of living than other forms of stay would have provided, necessarily implicated socializing with family members and also being exposed to a high degree of emotional load. Would I have to choose again in future research projects between the security of a familiar network and the risk of losing research time with logistical operations, I would choose the latter.

On a positive note, I was pleasantly surprised by the ease of access to my main research group, namely the groups of women engaging in the Semne Cusute network and its activities. My main concern prior to reaching my field site was the difficulty of establishing a rapport with my research group, namely middle to upper class urban middle aged women.

Fortunately, my previous online interactions with them proved sufficient to grant me an easy access to their activities and also gain their support. This proved crucial in making my multi-sited research, I visited several local branches distributed across the country, as each previous group I visited recommended me to the one I was about to visit next.

Other predicaments and challenges I had to face were related also to the costs. I lived in Romania until the age of 19 and then moved to Austria. Returning to Romania 7 years later for this research project I misjudged the financial shifts on the Romanian markets and the price shifts that naturally followed. Therefore, I started by fieldwork expecting prices that were 10 years out of date, which soon posed some financial difficulties, especially in regards to travel costs, which are very high.

5. The traditional rural dress in Romania and Bukovina



Figure 17: A multi-generational family donning a modern interpretation of regional specific folk dress in Bukovina, Humor Monastery

In this chapter I shall present an overview of the material and stylistic elements that define or are particular to the historic peasant garb in Romania. I shall start with defining the most important terminology used in connection with textile handcrafts and ornamentation. Then I shall provide a description of the general typology of the Romanian peasant dress starting with the most basic working garb to the festive dress worn on the major holidays or life events, and which is the exclusive reference point for the Semne Cusute community in their revitalization efforts.

After having established the main components, techniques, materials, cut and shape common to the Eastern European, Romanian traditional clothing I shall explore Erich Kolbenhayes descriptions of the embroideries and other specificities characteristic to the women's shirt, the Ia, from Bukovina and compare and contrast with other regional models, including those from Northern Bukovina, which is today on the territory of the state of Ukraine.

Lastly, I shall attempt a summary of decorative motifs on the Ia traditional rural embroidered shirts. Due to the enormous stylistic variety and sub regional differences in coloration, quality of material as well as combinatorial preference, and because there are constantly new patterns and motifs being discovered or created, this summary should not be regarded as complete but as inexhaustive and a work in progress.

Let us first look at the materials Romanian peasant dress is traditionally made from. Depending on the region and on the gender of the wearer the entire outfit can be made out of hemp (usually men's garments) or out of flax (linen would be mostly reserved for the women's shirts). Other materials used for different pieces of the outfit such as the women's aprons and skirts as well as the cold season jerkins or head dressing are sheep's wool, silk, silver threads (cf. Ghituleasa et.al. 2014: 66; Howe 2012; Iuga 2016: 43).

How are fabrics obtained? First the raw material is separated into four main categories: vegetal, animal, mineral and synthetic.

"Threads of the simplest possible form are plant and animal products which need only the minimum of processing before use for the production of textiles. The main steps involve collecting, cleaning, shredding, splitting and cutting the material (e.g. roots, leaves and stalks), the extraction of fibers from stalks and leaves, and the cutting of skin, leather and metal foils." (Seiler-Baldinger 1994: 2)

In order for these materials to become viable for the production of clothes or other textiles the previously extracted fibers which are at this stage too thin for individual use, and thus lack the necessary strength to resist tension, therefore they must be interlocked and consequently also elongated in order to create threads. The earliest known method used for this purpose is twisting several fibers between the hands on a surface until their structure homogenizes. The earliest method of thread formation which saw the usage of tools and technical implements to speed up the work process is spinning. The hand spindle or spinning wheel are the most archaic ones. Similarly, the oldest textile craft is sewing, with evidence for its widespread usage to the Paleolithic. The basic function of sewing is to stitch various objects together with a simple line of thread or similar material. Other techniques for creating more complex patterns viable also in ornamentation are: plying, gimping, braiding, crocheting and knitting and weaving⁴.

Products that consist of groups of interlaced threads forming repeating coherent patterns are called fabrics, which is often used interchangeably with textiles and in vernacular cloth. However, specialists will accurately note that a textile includes materials that are not made through any of the above techniques, such as carpets or geotextiles, thus when referring to materials which are used in the production of further goods, such as garments fabric or cloth is the appropriate term to use (cf. URL 21).

One of the most important technical developments that helped accelerate textile craft development to greater output but also greater decorative and patterning possibilities, was the loom. Used in weaving to interlace longitudinal threads, warps, with transverse threads, wefts, at right angles to each other automatically, meaning that each individual string was no longer required to be separated by hand, thus overlapping several groups of threads

⁴ For a detailed description of the technical details distinguishing between each of these methods of textile production see: Seiler-Baldinger 1994: passim.

simultaneously would become faster and easier (cf. Seiler-Baldinger 1994: 79).



Figure 19: Historic horizontal loom from Bukovina, Humor village

After the production of fabrics, which form the base material for garments, tapestries or other items, most craft women extensively decorate this base with embroidery.

"The term embroidery is used for ornamental methods [done on a finished fabric and with the use of needles] in which fabrics are decorated with a thread which is also used to fix itself to the base. [...] Embroidery exists in many forms, which are classified according to the stitches." (ibid: 139)

Therefore, depending on the pattern, direction, interval, repetition and density of the stitches different figures can be sewn into the fabric functioning as foundation (cf. ibid; URL: 24). A stitch is the movement by which thread is carried through a piece of fabric by the help of a needle from one side to the other. Since the needle needs to puncture through the meshwork of the fabric to pass the thread the possibility for diversification arises from the choices where to place the needle. Thus from the simplest linear stitches where each stroke of the needle follows the previous one in a straight line, many other, increasingly elaborate and difficult types are in use such as Back Stitches, Buttonhole Stitches and one favored by women Eastern Europe, the Cross Stitch.

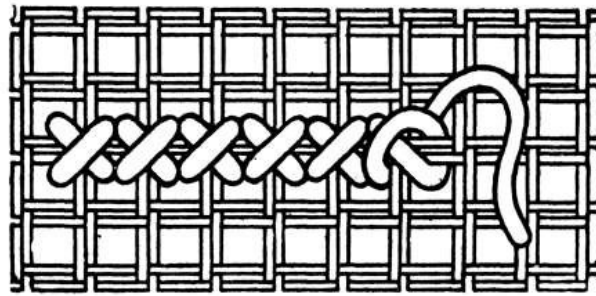


Figure 20: Cross stitch

Decorative arts, irrelevant of their material and technical properties generally follow a structure consisting of three parts: element, motif and composition.



Figure 21: Traditional Romanian embroidery with outlining of distinct decorative structures

No.: 1-3

Thus following the above figure:

No.1 highlights a decorative element. This is the simplest part of a decoration, such as a leaf, a circle or other simple geometric forms.

No. 2 corresponds to a decorative motif. A motif consists of the linking together of two or more decorative elements into a cohesive and mostly repeating pattern.

No.3 is the final composition of the decoration. It consists of various groups of decorative motifs placed in proximity to each other so as to convey a desired symbolic message. Considering that as expressed in previous chapters symbols are signs carrying complex sets of historically negotiated meanings and are used as communication devices, it follows that decorative compositions can be structured and ultimately also read as sentences by those who know the syntax and grammar, or the rules based on which these combinations make sense.

Naturally, embroideresses in Eastern Europe agree that:

"Just as you write letters, so we embroider stitches, or what writing is to you embroidery is to us." (Kelly 1999: 169)

Naturally, when considering the design of the decorations there are certain guidelines that one should follow at ones leisure.

The first rule of decorating is that it must maintain a certain order within its composition by delineating clearly motifs from each. This is important when repeating motifs and eases the eye to track each segment. Repetition is incremental in the design of any traditional decoration. However, successful embroidery also alternates motifs of similar coloring and form in order to make the first rule, demarcation, possible, as most of the time separating a repeating motif is done with the careful introduction into the pattern of a different one. This introduces the need for a unitary vision for the overall design of the ornamentation so that both motifs and chromatics are appropriate to with other. Symmetry, contrast and proportions are also important compositional elements as they ensure the overall pleasant aesthetic appearance of the embroidered item and provide reference to the item the ornament is supposed to enhance. Therefore, symmetry and proportion in traditional clothing always reference the human body first before anything else (Corduneanu in: Larsson 2013).

Based on the degree of ornamentation and its detailing the traditional rural clothing in Romania can be split into two main categories: everyday working clothes and festive dress. With the former being very plane and undifferentiated for both men and women. The festive dress, however, can be separated again according to gender. While men's clothes are usually very simple with minimal ornamentation: "white hemp shirt and trousers during the summer, with a waistcoat made of sheep skin or felt. [...] The shirts they wear are decorated around

the V-shaped neck and sometimes have a collar. The sleeve ends are decorated." (Iuga 2016: 43) and are designed more for practicality than representation.



Figure 22: Myself and two of my interviewees wearing different styles of Romanian traditional dress, note the difference in ornamentation between the male/female garb and the festive/working garb - Vatra Dornei

Women's festive clothes on the other hand are lavishly decorated. The women's outfit consists of three main items and one optional. A white tunic or chemise, called in Romanian *Ie*, a name reserved by tradition exclusively for the female shirts, a belt and a tubular over-wrap are the main elements, a head covering, usually a headscarf, and which can present extreme variety in design and shape, is often worn but not symbolically central.

The Ie, is either a very long white linen or hemp shirt stretching to the ankles or a short one, only to the level of the navel, with large voluminous sleeves.



Figure 23: Full length Ie

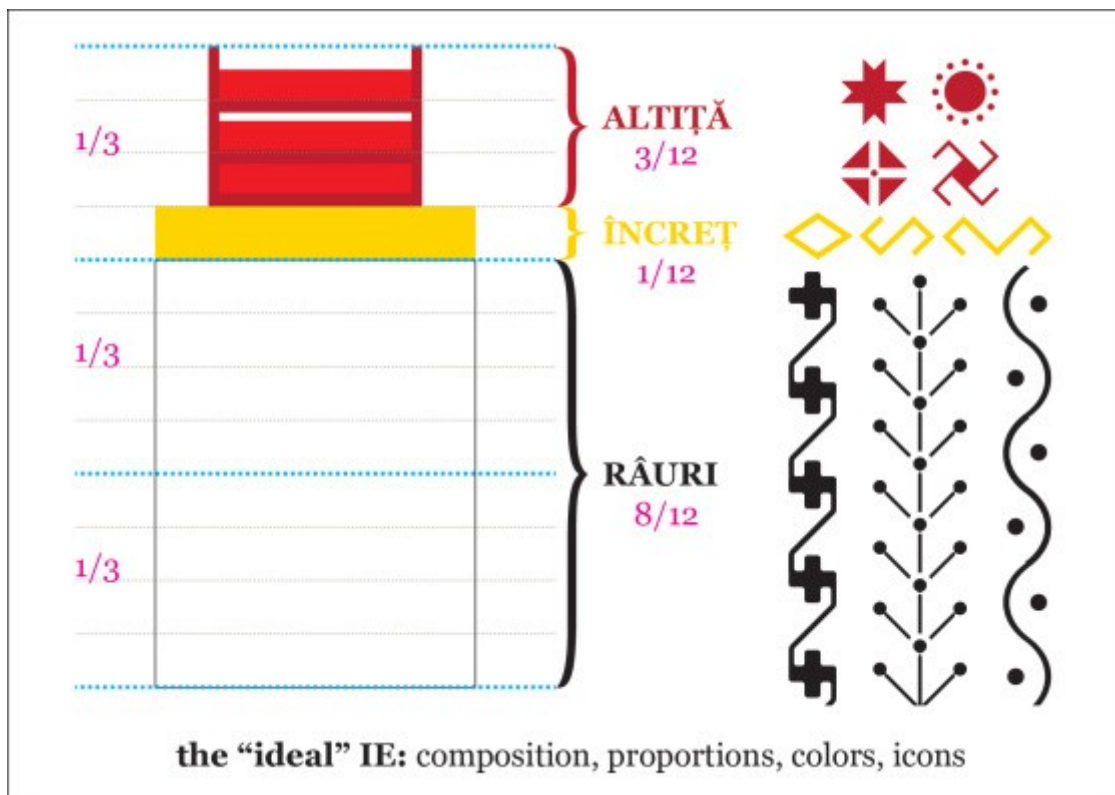


Figure 24: Short Ie with different sleeve types

Because most of the length of the Ie is covered, only the visible parts, these include the neck opening, front and back side, shoulders, sleeves and hem, are heavily embroidered and relevant, this is one of the reasons why for practicality reasons as well as to conserve resources the short cut variant was created (cf. Howe 2012; Iuga 2016: 44; Corduneanu in: Larsson 2013; Lutic et.al. 2012: 215f). Looking at the design of the Ie one can easily identify that the sleeves are important due to the diversity of their shapes, cuts, lengths as well as due to the fact they are the surfaces with the most embroideries. The special interest that is given to the sleeve as a compositional element is an interesting topic that when analyzed

typologically and historically reveals ancient Euro-Asian origins in connection with mythological depictions of dancing bird women that populate the cosmologies of peoples stretching from the Carpathians to China in the East and Iran in the South. The connecting element linking the Romanian *Ie* to this cross cultural legacy is the peculiar length of the sleeve in some of the oldest designs, where it almost overstretches the arms length. Although very rare in Romania, the ultra-long sleeve is a staple for South Russian traditional women's shirts, where it is ritually and mythically embedded into the spiritual experience of the Slavic peoples through its association with the Rusalii maidens.⁵ Even though not associated with any ritual practice in Romania, still the sleeve of the *Ie* is given special attention when embroidered, especially concerning the rules of the distribution of decorative compositions. These are divided among three distinct ornamental field or sections.

The shoulder segment, called "*Alțiță*", from the Latin - "*Alto*", meaning "up", presents a very dense pattern of embroidery consisting of successive repeating motifs layered on top of each other. Directly under it there is a separating band called "*Încreț*" which serves the purpose of



⁵ In her essay "The Curious Tale of the Ultra-Long sleeve" E. Barber traces this design feature through its diffusion both in time and space from Russia where Slav peasant communities actively continue creating women's shirts with ultra-long sleeves, to the first farmers in Europe and Anatolia in the fourth millennium BC. whose anthropomorphic depictions of hybrid bird/female beings found at sites indicating religious practice including sacrificial offerings appear remarkably similar to the Slavic girls' Rusalii dance practiced today.

Figure 25: Compositional structure of a sleeve for the *Ie* with the three ornamental fields delineated.

separating the shoulder piece from the rest of the sleeve. This particular segment is of a contrasting color and is always "sown in a geometrical composition based on diamond shaped motifs" (Lutic 2012: 216). Finally, the rest of the sleeve is decorated with vertical or oblique running rows of motifs called "*Râuri*" meaning rivers. Depending on the design there can be just one column placed in the middle of the sleeve or up to five - six when arranged diagonally. In popular saying they are also called "*Calea ocolită/rătăcită*" meaning the winding or lost path. This name is derived from the interpretation of the rivers as indicating symbolically the life story of the woman who embroidered them, therefore it is here that the most creative freedom is allowed for personal expression when choosing and combining motifs and decorative elements (cf. Howe 2012; Corduneanu in: Larsson 2013; Lutic 2012: 216).

The second basic element of a woman's dress is the apron or skirt. The apron and skirt combinations vary widely from region to region and between ethnic groups, they are also intricately decorated and allow immense combinatorial possibilities. Furthermore, there are strict rules applied to who is allowed to wear what type of lower body covering based on age and social status. Depending on the length, cut, shape, style of wear, whether it is worn on the front or the back, ethnographers distinguish between the following types of aprons listed from the far north where Slavic influences dominate to the far south where Mediterranean influences are recorded: the *panjova* (mostly in Ukraine but does appear in remote mountain villages just across the Romanian border), the *zadie* (in Maramureș), the *catrință* (in Bukovina), the *fotă* (in Bukovina and the rest of Moldavia and central Romania), the *vâlnic* (in central Romania), the *opreg* (in south western Romania). I shall not go into further descriptive detail on the skirt / apron because it strays too far from the topic of my thesis which is primarily the *Ie*, but ethnographic, archeological and linguistic evidence suggests a continued tradition of women creating and wearing knitted, woven or sewn string skirts from as far back as the Paleolithic.⁶

⁶ Further in depth research on the topic of the history and evolution of Eastern European women's dress is presented in the following books and articles by Elizabeth Barber: *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years*, 1994 and *On the Antiquity of East European Bridal Clothing*, 1999.



Figure 2.5. Stone Age figurines of women wearing string skirts: from (a) Gagarino, Russia (ca. 20,000 B.C.); (b) Šipintsi, western Ukraine (ca. 3500 B.C.); (c) Vinča, Serbia (4500 B.C.); (d) Crnokalačka Bara, Yugoslav Macedonia (ca. 3000 B.C.). Compare figs. 2.6–2.8. The bindings on the feet of (d) look very much like the crude bast shoes with cloth leg bindings used by Russian and Ukrainian peasants into this century.

Figure 26: Paleolithic figurines of women wearing string skirts

The most striking feature of Romanian embroidery, however, is the tendency to avoid realism in its symbolic representations. The symbolic universe of the Romanian peasant is marked by interpretation and idealization of the shapes and forms obtained from the natural environment. Geometry is favored over the curved sinuous line thus we find the organic interpreted and encoded through basic geometry rather than a realistic depiction as if custom with other peoples. Giving us a preview into the pre-industrial context of rural Bukovina and the original means of creating such beautiful clothes is Erich Kolbenhayers pioneering ethnographic work from the turn of the last century. In the next chapter I shall explore this seemingly lost world coming back to life through the passages of his work and pinpoint what makes Bukovina embroideries and thus the regional dress specific and unique.

5.1. Erich Kolbenhayer and the embroideries from Bukovina



Figure 27: Cover of Erich Kolbenhayer's monograph "Motive der Hausindustriellen Stickerei in der Bukovina"

"There are moments when people don't have a clear vision of what the future might bring, the present is depressing and so they look back in the past, an idealized past, trying to find something reliable, solid and certain. Inspiration and ideas to recycle. Romanians had such crucial moments after 1856 and especially after 1918 – and now is the time that we do this again." (Corduneanu in Larsson 2013)

Primary source material for Ms. Corduneanu who bases many of her core tenets concerning the traditional *Ie* on the details about the craft practice at the turn of the twentieth century described therein, this volume plays a crucial role in defining traditional Romanian material culture as well as the identity of many members of Semne Cusute community. Taking a critical stance towards both the content of the book as well as the appropriation of it to fit the narrative desired by Ms. Corduneanu and the Semne Cusute community is the goal of this chapter.

Erich Kolbenhayer wrote this early monograph at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, over a time frame of several decades, which he spent living, working, traveling and collecting ethnographic data and artifacts in Bukovina, at that time Crownland of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His ethnographic work was facilitated by both the imperial authorities and military, who provided logistical support as well as members of the local nobility, in particular Ms. Helene von Popovicz the President of the Bukovina Women's Union thank to whose efforts it was possible for him to gain access to such a gender specific domain of activity (cf. Kolbenhayer 1912: 11).

Sewing, weaving and embroidery was a century ago, just as it still remains today, an exclusively female dominated practice. Closely tied to the domestic and the familiar it was an activity that wasn't considered economically viable and therefore was used only as a means to provide the family with the necessary vestimentary requirements. Thus it was an activity that was perceived as neither work nor a hobby, but more of a house chore. The needlework would be done mainly evenings after fieldwork at home with several generations of women working together (cf. *ibid* 13). Kolbenhayer notes that although the products derived from the rural textile home industry could not become economically viable at that time, their importance was evident in the respect and attention they were given. Furthermore, every peasant home was required by custom to possess at least one loom and the necessary tools needed in the processes of textile craft making. At an individual level it was a matter of great pride for young women to be able to create the textiles needed for their dowry by themselves. Equally, a young bride would bestow great respect and honor upon herself and implicitly her family if she would craft her own wedding dress as well as the ritual cloths that traditionally belong in the *zestre* - the large wooden chest that would have contained all the material possessions a young bride would take over to her new home (cf *ibid*). Thus we can deduct that textile crafts were traditionally and habitually tied to the daily management of the homestead as well as intrinsic to the ritual cycle of family life as cloths are key items that were used to delineate the sacred from the profane. Ascribed potent apotropaic power cloth was not only decorative but in a magico-religious sense functional in establishing, configuring and partitioning space, especially concerning the interior of the peasant house, whose public rooms are thoroughly draped with embroidered textiles in order to welcome any

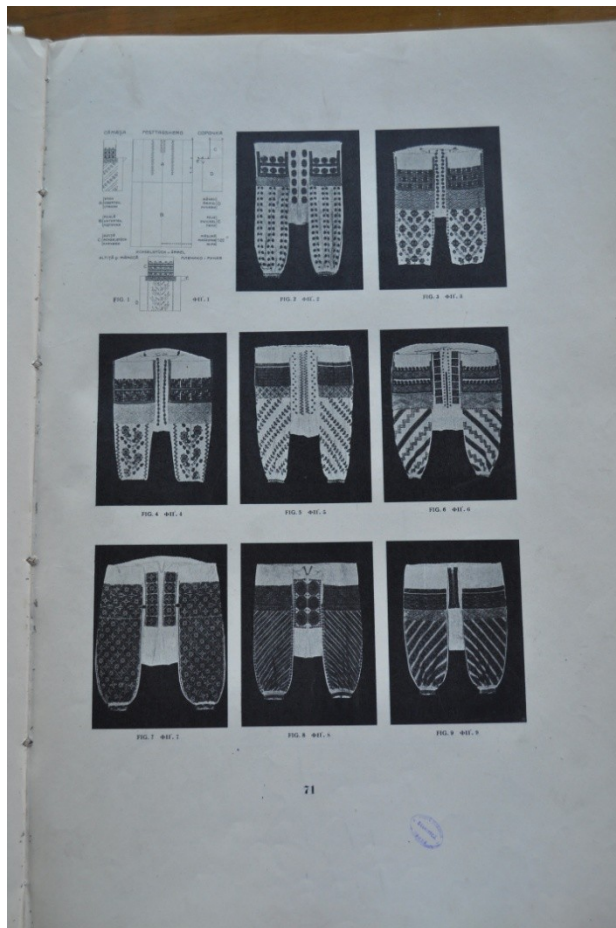
guests in a representative manner but more importantly to ward against bad fortune or other negative influences⁷.

Another important observation Kolbenhayer makes is that the women in the villages of Bukovina were not using any appliances (such as scissors or grids) to help them ease the sewing and embroidery process and that every stitch was done freehand (cf. *ibid*: 20). This is an incremental point that is used today by the members of the Semne Cusute group and others involved with the revitalization efforts to emphasize the authenticity and thus superior value of vintage garments. This strong emphasis on the handmade characteristic of historic cloths fuels the arguments stating that modern, machine made items are cheap replicas of the traditional *Ie* and because of this industrial manufacturing process they can not possess the same symbolic meaning as the patterns embroidered on them are not the result of a personal choice, reflecting therefore the individual seamstress' particularities, or life story, but are selected by business owners without concern for their meaning, context or origin [issues that I shall address more in depth in Chapter 6 of this thesis]. An interesting particularity in the description of the stitching process is the direction in which the Bukovinean women used to drive the needle, namely the motion would direct the thread away from the body of the person thus being the exact opposite of the regular rule (cf. *ibid*).

The main corpus of Kolbenhayer's work consists of a detailed description of the typology and compositional structure of the traditional peasant garb in both its festive and basic forms. Since I have expounded on this topic in the previous chapter and due to the fact that the primary materials, the general shape, cut, and compositional elements on the garments from Bukovina does not differ from that of the greater Carpathian region, I shall continue with the passages where the author compares the ornamentation on the traditional cloths he documented in predominantly Romanian villages with those from Ruthenian [Ukrainian] ones.

⁷ Anamaria Iuga's 2011 dissertation "*Valea Izei îmbrăcată țărănește*" is a very well documented in depth ethnographic description of the various roles cloth plays in the creation and usage of space in the Romanian peasant's home.

One of the best contributions Kolbenhayer brought to the study of the traditional Ie in Bukovina was his extensive use of sketching and even photographs which provide accurate representations of the diverse models of shirts both festive and everyday he encountered. His use of visual material to support his descriptions of ornament and coloring the most crucial elements establishing the representative and symbolic potential of a traditional shirt is continuous and provides the reader with crucial reference material.



Figures 28 and 29: Collection of sketches and graphics representing traditional Ie designs from Bukovina in Erich Kolbenhayer's monograph "Motive der Hausindustriellen Stickerei in der Bukovina"

It is also important to stress the fact that Kolbenhayer treats his sources with respect and a high degree of impartiality, he is not favoring any particular ethnic group over the other by embellishing their skill, workmanship or most importantly antiquity of designs. Considering that he wrote his account based on observations during the first decade of the twentieth century, a period as described in Chapter 2.1 of this thesis where Bukovina experienced most of its ethnic tensions with both Romanian and a rapidly increasing Ruthenian populations

vying for more political power and preferential treatment from the Austro-Hungarian authorities, his narrative is fair and clearly attempts to expose the uniqueness of the "national dress" of both factions while also reminding the readership that symbols and elements of material culture tend to circulate freely within space and time, gaining new meanings as they become adopted and repurposed by different groups (cf. *ibid*: *passim*). Kolbenhayer also provides linguistic evidence for the intermingling of decorative influences, as he notes that certain ornaments bare toponymical references next to their customary name. This he accounts to the high volume of intermarriages that result in the bride moving in to the grooms village and thus importing the stylistic particularities of her community, thus for example Ruthenian villagers describe some of the decorations on their shirts with the term "woloskie" which indicates a southern Romanian, Walachian, origin (cf. *ibid*: 25). Furthermore, the rich decorative style which features a broad covering of the shirts surface with multicolored embroideries is limited according to Kolbenhayer to mostly the Carpathian range and the further away towards the flatlands of back then Galicia, today Ukraine, one descends the peasant garb turn increasingly somber. This is an argument which often used by Romanian groups with nationalist agendas to prove the superior craftsmanship of Romanian folk art. However, Kolbenhayer goes on to explain that for the most part the stylistic differences between the embroideries in Bukovina and Galicia should be accounted to the fact that the former has a wider variety of natural dyes and fibers to use locally while also benefitting from the historically inherited increased trade with Balkan and Anatolia due to its past as a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, the marked differences between textiles from Bukovina and Galicia, especially in terms of the latter's lack of important structural elements such as the vertically running stripes on the sleeves and chest of the *Ie* or the fact that the shoulder band is not differentiated into two separate fields, indicate that throughout Bukovina the influences on traditional textile crafts came predominantly from the Romanians living to the South and West.

In terms of the concrete stylistic differences between Ruthenian and Romanian designs in Bukovina Kolbenhayer emphasizes the important role of color and spacing of elements within the decorative fields laid out by the compositional structure. I shall present here his observations concerning the use of color to distinguish ethnic differences in dress and membership to different social categories. I shall devote the next chapter to a summarization of decorative motifs commonly found on traditional peasant garb in the Carpathian range and demonstrate why attempting to formulate a narrative of difference by claiming exclusive

ownership in the name of one ethnic group to the detriment of the other is in this context wrong and unfounded.

The chromatic range found on these clothes predominantly features next to the baseline white, the color of the shirt, and black, the color used for special structural stitches such as those uniting different parts of the *Ie* together, as well as a symbol for maturity, red, ochre, light yellow, orange, brown, green and blue. Red is the most important color in the palette of the Eastern European textiles outweighing heavily all the other colors in both frequency and range of usage, even though the process of obtaining red dye was more difficult and took longer time than others. This concludes that the widespread use of red in folk textiles was linked with the symbolic potency of red as a concept which, in magico-religious thinking assumes the beneficial properties of blood. Thus Kolbenhayer accurately makes note of the special significance this color is given and of certain rules that mandate the color red for the *altiță*, the ornamented shoulder patch on bridal shirts, as well as on young girls' shirts neck - and hemlines. In certain communities he observed that the ritual importance of red was strictly followed and that all the embroideries on a wedding shirt, also called the virgin shirt, irrespective of their position within the compositional structure of the *Ie* were kept in red (cf. *ibid*: 21; Williams 1999: 146). Furthermore, some communities also mandated the exclusive usage of black for the shirts worn by aged women.

The selection of color in circumstances that weren't highly ritualized, followed a rule of threes. The *Ie* as described by Erich Kolbenhayer features combinations of three colors, one primary, one secondary and one complementary or neutral that was used to selectively highlight certain motifs or to create space between the various compositional elements. The main differences between Romanian and Ruthenian cloths in Bukovina lie with the choice and usage of colors. Thus Ruthenian designs favor bright yellow, silver and green which are often mixed together in the stitches forming individual motifs, while Romanians favor blue, red and yellow, which are never mixed together in the design of a single motif. Another indices for difference is the coloring of the narrow separating band between the shoulder patch and the rest of the sleeve, which Ruthenians traditionally mark with green, thus a darker tone, while Romanians color in yellow, thus a lighter tone (cf. Kolbenhayer 1912: 30). Because on an *Ie* everything has pertinent symbolism attached to it, this separating band is linked with female virtues, so while the fresh green of the Ruthenian can indicate fertility the mellow yellow points more towards the role of the woman as a wife and a home keeper, thus towards balance. Differences such as these are important because they indicate to the

experienced reader, of which all women used to be and some still are today, details about the hierarchy of values of a community, or the life stages of the wearer.

The production of all natural dyes obtained from exclusively vegetal sources was also a task that was performed by the peasant women on their homestead. Kolbenhayer provides detailed notes on the raw materials and the exact processes of extracting color from them. In these notes we find confirmed pre-Christian ritual formulae and practices that demonstrate the continuity of peasant textile production in Bukovina from antiquity as well as an existing system of magico-religious beliefs based on human-natural analogies as described in Chapter 3.2.1 of this thesis (cf. *ibid*: 22). This further emphasizes the fact that for the Bukovinean peasant's daily life was deeply embedded into complex cosmogonic systems of reciprocity, therefore as Mircea Eliade expertly concludes it "has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is at the same time cosmic, since it has a transhuman structure" (URL 19). This condition is reflected also in the range of decorative motifs and symbols found on the *Ie*, a topic I shall address in the following chapter.

5.2. A summary of decorative motifs on the *Ie* traditional rural embroidered shirts

"The use of adornment has something to do with man's image of himself in relation to the world he experiences. In adornment we see a use of nature (the material component) to reject or distinguish oneself from nature (animals and human nakedness) and to affirm the human or cultural aspect of life." (Schwarz 1979: 41)

The use of personal adornment is one of the oldest forms of aesthetic expression through which humans express the complex meanings that are formed in their relationship with their natural and social environment. The need for creating acts of personal display is demonstrative of humans' conceptual capacity to generate systems of meaning that categorize their experience into complex systems of valuation. These also are a means for representation of said categories, as indicators of individual status, group identity, social stratification and any other inherited or acquired characteristics, and are showcasing the fact that people derive pleasure and a sense of order or belonging from such acts of representation. Thus personal adornment is an act that tells primarily the story of the self, of the individual, yet has meaning and gains value only due to the networks of relationships with other people (cf. Bean 1989: 358; Bubolz Eicher, Roach 1979:7f).

The Romanian peasant garb, particularly the festive shirts, called Ia or Ie, are part of a secular tradition of personal adornment using cloths that as I shall attempt to demonstrate in this chapter has roots in the agrarian cults of the early Neolithic Eastern European farmers whose decorative motifs have been preserved from generation to generation by women teaching their daughters the delicate practice of stitching and embroidery.

The Romanian traditional garb has excellent artistic and historic value not only because of the high aesthetic standards it represents, or the antiquity of its origin, but mainly because it represents the most diversified collection of motifs, possible in all of Eastern Europe. Austere and simple in basic shape and cut the, white linen shirt, the Ia features a total of 112 unique regional variations on the territory of modern day Romania, a feat made possible only by the beauty, refinement of the decorative elements adorning it, which due to the richness of the motifs offer vast combinatorial possibilities (cf. Ghituleasa et.al. 2014: 68).

The ornamentation on the Ia can be classified into two major groups: abstract, where the individual elements are synthesized into geometric representations consisting of only basic figures such as triangles, square and very importantly rhombs; and realistic ornaments. The latter ones are themselves divided again into three categories physiomorphic, skeuomorphic and social. In the first category are included motifs inspired by floral (phytomorphic); animal, (zoomorphic); human (anthropomorphic) and cosmic elements (cf. Lutic 2012: passim).

Phytomorphic motifs are inspired by the vegetal world, with flowers, tree leafs and fruits being the main represented items. Some of the most frequently represented motifs in this category are: daisies, roses, mountain peonies, sunflowers, grapes and the leafs of fir and beech trees.

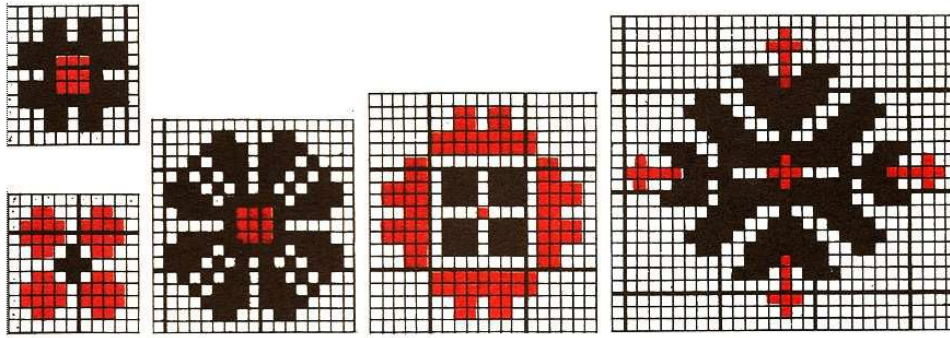


Figure 31: Ornamental phytomorphic motifs (Lutic 2012: 217)

In the category of zoomorphic motifs the most frequently used are inspired by the ram's horns and the ox's head as well as various horse figures. A variety of bird motifs such as the rooster, the sparrow and the combination of a bird and a flower or seed are commonly used as well.

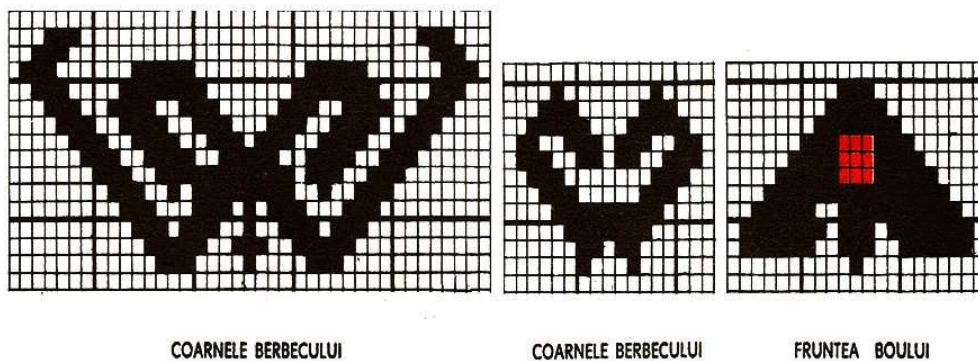


Figure 32: Ram's horns and ox's head motifs (Lutic 2012: 219)

Less often used, but also important decorative elements belong to the skeuomorphic category and include stylized depictions of the material utilities employed by the peasants in their daily work and life such as rakes, silts, ploughs, hacks and forks.

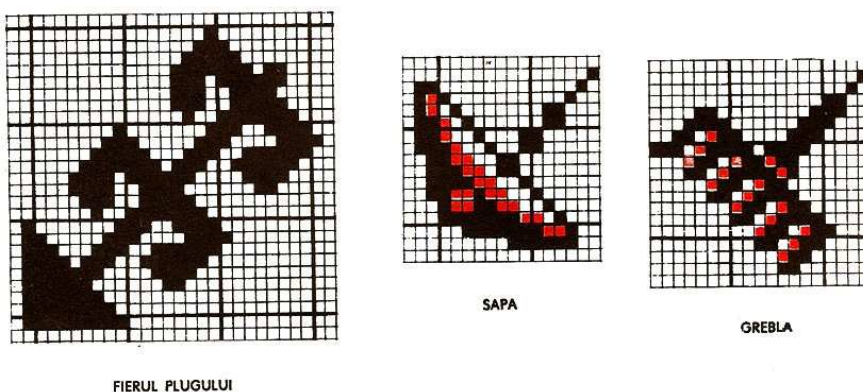


Figure 33: Skeuomorphic ornamental motifs (Lutic 2012: 219)

Stars, the sun and spirals representing the infinity of the universe demonstrate the expanse of the mental world of the

rural world into cosmologic matters. However, as Mircea Eliade explains, the tendency of the archaic man's mode of world conceptualization, of which the rural communities of Eastern Europe are a distant glimmer, was to represent the macrocosm in the microcosm of their own selves, which is why the tendency towards anthropomorphism emerged (cf. URL 19). Accordingly, the spiral, is often interpreted as a stylized representation of the ram's horns motif and is associated with male virility and power, yet, archeological evidence from the Cucuteni-Tripolye culture offers numerous depictions of spirals incised on the body of female figurines, such as the ones on Figure 8 from Chapter 2.1, while also presenting artifacts that depict horned beasts' heads, yet these display no spirals. This is an interesting case in which a particular decorative motif can be traced back into furthest antiquity and its symbolic associations as well as their gradual shifts and changes can be accurately traced.

Two of the most important motifs predominant in all types of embroideries as well as other traditional craft products from Bukovina and the Carpathian basin are perhaps also the oldest and longest symbols with traceable continuous usage in Eastern Europe and possibly the world, namely Rhombic Fertility symbols and Mother and Daughter Images (cf. Kelly 1999:161).



Figure 34: Ms. Corduneanu in front of Semne Cusute placards depicting rhombic fertility motifs, Vienna

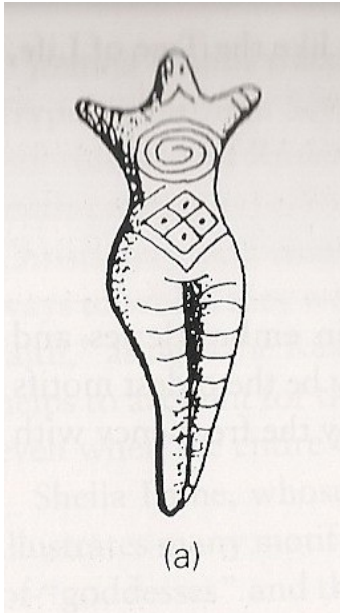


Figure 35: Goddess with fertile field incised on abdomen, Cucuteni culture, northern Moldavia, fifth millennium BC (cf. Kelly 1999: 163)

The Rhombic Fertility symbol "looks like a diamond that is quartered; in each quarter a dot represents a fertilized seed.[...] The symbol can be seen alone as it was on the abdomen of the Neolithic figurine, or between her legs as a sexual indicator." (cf. *ibid.*) An ostensibly female motif the filled or dotted rhombus is used not only as a decorative element on textiles but in a variety of contexts, yet never changing its original meaning. Thus it used as a marking for birch tree by foresters because in Slavic

cosmology this tree is thought to represent women. Ethnographers also documented ritualized agricultural practices involving the partitioning of a newly ploughed field into four equal quadrants and the planting of a seedling in each of them in order to benefit a rich harvest. This motif also functions as a powerful protective charm thus it used to find replication not only in visual depictions but also for example in architectural design.

"When people built a new house [...] they first drew a quartered diamond on the ground, then fetched a large stone from four fields and placed a stone in each of the quadrants making a fertile field for the house to be built upon." (*ibid.*: 161)

The Mother and Daughter Symbol is one of the more complex motifs that are not easily identifiable due to them being heavily stylized. Belonging to the category of social anthropomorphic motifs it consists of chains of female figures placed in a row or column one above the other or next to each other. The positioning of the figures is crucial, as each one in the sequence is placed with her head between the legs of the other. On rare occasions the model can be found inverted, so as the second figure sprouts out of the head of the first.

"On the wall painting [see Figure 36 (g)] the Mother goddess has outstretched legs, her daughter is shown between them, and *her* daughter is between *her* legs. Through repetition of the female image, a matrilineal chain is indicated." (*ibid.* 164).

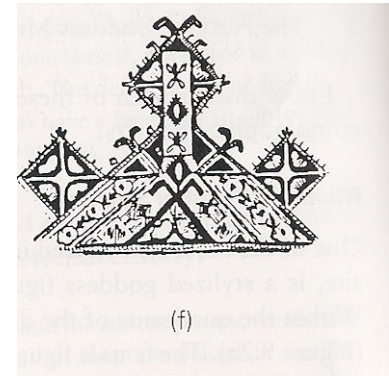
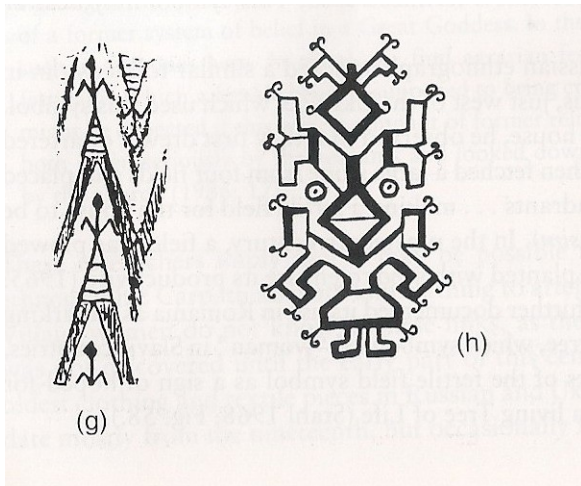


Figure 37: Horned goddess, fertile field at her side, daughter in her skirt. Kosmach, Ukraine

Figure 36: (g) Wall painting of mother daughter chain. Anatolia, Neolithic / (h) Mother goddess with daughter on her head. Bukovina, twentieth century.

One important particularity of the Mother Daughter motif is its positioning on the body of the wearer. Thus unlike other symbols this one can be often found in the upper front area of the apron or skirt, right where the pelvis or genitals of the woman would be, they are also a favorite motif for women's belts or waistbands. Such usage characteristics point towards some form of continuation of beliefs and practices throughout the ages, with women today, in the nineteenth century or in the Neolithic expressing similar experiences, concerns and physical realities through symbolic devices which by the virtue of repetition will continue to be meaningful as long as they reflect the lived experience of future generations as well.

Having up to this point in the thesis presented information that is relevant to establish the proper geographic, historic, social as well as theoretical contexts that shape the realities with which the Semne Cusute community engages, appropriate and shapes to further the common goal of revitalizing a form of heritage that they are convinced is threatened I shall continue with presenting and critically examining my findings from my fieldwork. Furthermore I will attempt to elucidate the complex network of meanings that makeup the semiotic space in which the practices of this community are engendered while maintaining a critical stance towards their arguments via fact checking and comparison with historical evidence and personal observations.

6. 'Semne Cusute' - case study



Figure 38: Printed placard representing Ms. Corduneanu's matrilineal genealogy by means of traditional motifs found on the Ie, used as promotional material for Semne Cusute in Vienna

"We as a people have identity issues and the IE is talking just about that: identity! [The Ie tells who you are.] Nobody else from west or east can teach us to be what we are best: Romanians! [...] I knew the young would try to find answers on google and I couldn't let 'no results were found' happen to them." (Corduneanu in Larsson 2013)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Romanian society is gradually emerging out of a decade long period of transition from the chaos of a post-socialist state authority that was riddled with corruption and lack of political authority towards a consolidated democratic state open to the forces of the global markets and eager to model its institutions and modus operandi after fellow European Union member states and the so called Western World.

In order to understand why cultural revivalist groups such as Semne Cusute suddenly appeared and were met with resounding success in attracting interest and new members the

direct link towards the societal ruptures that swept over the Romanian state with the 1989 fall of half a century of socialist political rule must be stressed.

Hojer and Pedersen describe permanent uncertainty as a socio economic context manifested in post-socialist settings, that is bound entirely in the present, in the moment, seemingly allowing little ability to “plan ahead” due to a political and economic environment bereft of order and where trust is scarce and fragile (Hojer, Pedersen 2008:73).

"Everything was forever until it was no more - Alexei Yurchak"

This statement closely reflects, in my view, the experiences which the vast majority of peoples of the former Eastern Bloc underwent at the turn of the centuries. It symbolizes the break of the societal bonds and underlying structures which usually frame daily routines, the agency and the identity of individuals abiding together according to commonly agreed upon terms, bound by mutually reinforcing networks of symbolic communication which create the semiotic space necessary for the routinization of strategies of action. In other words the social cohesion that held communities together shattered as a consequence of the dramatic inversion or loss of meanings informing the daily existence of millions, namely those ideas which inform the state and purpose of being and point towards the desired progression both as an individual entity as well as a group. To understand what changed in the cold nights of December 1989 that created the conditions in which the efforts of Ms. Corduneanu founder of the Semne Cusute community which uses traditional textile handcrafting as a means to forward, and visual manifestation, of their social, artistic, political aspirations towards an increase in the popular awareness and pride in the Romanian heritage, which translates into the Romanian people and their creative potential.

The socialist system envisaged the individual as a result of the exerted influence of the community which in turn was understood as the bodily manifestation of the political ideals. One can therefore logically infer the reasoning behind Soviet social engineering, namely, it was assumed that society would always remain in a state of stability capable of withstanding individual outliers and agitators by tying in personal interests with institutional stability via a centrally run allocation process of rank, position and privilege within the state machinery. In this context the state would function as the sole guarantor of material wealth while the people would be the guarantor of compliance by mutually reinforcing those values which serve the state in a race to become beneficiaries of said benefits.

The guarantors of social continuity, namely, personal agency and identity politics were based in socialism on the premises that the fate of the individual is inherently tied to the fate of the group in a process of mutually referencing parameters. Therefore, the state enterprise maintained many of the traditional social functions inherited from the social organization of small scale communities such as villages, yet extrapolated their functions nation-wide and shifted the center periphery relations to the central party bureaus in Bucharest. The system of communal checks and balances through which individual behavior shaped by the community rested within traditional village settings in the informal exchanges that took place between members of the family unit and the rest of the villagers. In socialism this was broken out of the familiar bonds \, often times forcefully, and integrated into an individual's social group as designated by the political authorities. Nevertheless, the individual's options for self iteration remained firmly embedded within some type of collective mentality and therefore open to direct interference from one's peers. Drastic changes to this basic setup occurred after Romania opened its physical and ideological borders to Western influences; changes which are both cause and effect for the complex and multilayered enterprise that started off as the personal blog of Ms.Corduneanu, called Semne Cusute. A project which, through the effective implementation and dissemination of various key strategies of action carefully designed to offer alternatives to a series of both local and global problems, on the part of the founder, grew into a well networked community operating in such a way that befits its categorization as a revitalization movement according to the principles outlined in Chapter 3.1.

The story of Romania's most powerful cultural movement since the breakup of the Soviet Union and its independence, which aims to restore in Romanians a sense for the unique beauty and value of their unsullied rural heritage, ironically, begins in one of Europe's most progressive capitals, Berlin.

"[In 2011] I have exhibited at the DMY international design festival in Berlin. I had some messages to send. The message for those at home [in Romania]: We too can be there, we have something to show, we have something unique that defines us. Our ancient wisdom can issue forth a renewal. The message for them [Germans and other Europeans]: Do not forget about Romania, you do not know us yet, but you may be surprised, although we still miss a lot of things, we have great potential." (Corduneanu in: Gutierrez 2016)

External influences exerted by a hegemonic power either forcing or making processes of acculturation look appealing are considered in Wallace's classic study of revitalization movements among the primary causes that kick start revitalizing processes (cf. Wallace 1956: 269). As can be inferred from the above quote as well as from Ms. Corduneanu's further reasoning, the same applies for the inception of the Semne Cusute movement.

Ms. Corduneanu, an architect and retail designer by trade was exposed to a multitude of international experiences through the many travel requirements of her work designing and laying out stores (cf. Corduneanu in: Larsson 2013). Working abroad a lot is an experience which she shares with the millions of Romanians who, following the free travel agreement with the EU sought work abroad. However, unlike the vast majority, she had a favored financial and material setup that allowed her to not give up her permanent residence in Romania. Being in constant contact both with the socio-political reality back home as well as having the opportunity to experience Western lifestyle, appreciate the benefits of a regulated market and of a system that fosters innovation and personal venture that she encountered there, helped her become increasingly aware of global trends in ideological discourse. Taking these observations into account and referencing them with the historical, material and ideological heritage from Romania, Ms. Corduneanu noticed the failing capacity of strategies of action in play both at home and abroad to service the needs of people and offer viable solutions for their problems. The initial imbalances Ms. Corduneanu sought to rectify with her reappraisal of traditional craft making concern, in first order, the global problem of unsustainable consumerism and the depletion of resources, which she sees addressed and solved in the cyclic usage of objects embedded in the rural setting:

"I was totally opposed to the vast majority who were still very much involved in the development of new technologies and so I said [...]: While you are struggling to create a new completely recyclable material, the Romanian peasant had no garbage because the objects in his home were all recycled, because they had more lives [...] they were used until they degraded, and then they would be switched and used elsewhere. So when they degraded, the peasant would use them for something else, a task with less value, and so they would continue to be downgraded in their area of usage until they reintegrated into nature and you did not have garbage. Is anyone thinking of doing so in our days? To create an object with more lives, a multi-purpose object?" (Ioana Corduneanu)

Her more pragmatic solution to the question of balancing out the increased consumerism of capitalist societies, recently imported in Romania and now heavily dominating the national consciousness and negatively affecting the home economy, is the one on which mandates the practices of the Semne Cusute community, namely:

"Another method [to quell the need to propagate the cycle of unsustainable consumption] is to

give a person reasons to form an intimate relation with an object. Instead of telling him: Go out and buy something new because the trends have changed, you tell him to craft this shirt to not only last him a lifetime, but to last for three generations, and that makes him commit to it, even more so because he is the one who crafted it.[...] After that, nobody will ever want to throw away an Ie, not after you've been working at it for six months, and you'll then see how nobody will want to go to the mall to buy I do not know what dress to go with to an event, because they've got their Ie. And all that money is no longer sent to Spain or wherever it ends up in, but it stays in the country." (Ioana Corduneanu)

By focusing on the quality of individual manual labor and enforcing this practice to all members of the Semne Cusute group, Ms.Corduneanu not only tackles in a practical and pragmatic way the general societal problem of over consumption, but also by assuming a position of economic nationalism, and stressing the importance of conscious spending, she addresses another systemic problem in contemporary Romania, the oversaturation of the market with imported goods, costing the already weakened home industries heavily. It is important to also note the way Ms.Corduneanu makes use of genealogy and references to the future generations as positive reinforcement for her arguments, while acknowledging the very real concern of many Romanians that the state does far too little for the dissemination of traditions with the youth.

Another intended rectification that is addressed by her proposed emphasis on manual production following the rules of tradition, relates to the skewed perception of value that insidiously crept into the Romanian consciousness following the overwhelming influx of products after communism. If during the fifty years of the socialist regime most Romanians were facing severe shortages in even the most basic of goods, the advent of free markets saw a surplus of products available for purchase but a slow rise in wages, thus leading many consumers in their effort to display wealth to opt for quantity over quality. With the vast majority of consumers buying mass produced, cheap and easily available goods heavily disfavored the few craftsmen left to compete with mass retailers pushing prices ever lower, a fact confirmed to me by Ms. Lina Jucan, the founder of a rural branch of Semne Cusute in the heartland of Bukovina, who laments the lack of appreciation by the general public of the high investment in labor time needed for a traditionally crafted shirt.

"With the purchasing power of Romanians being as low as we know, it's not surprise that the imported shirts will always be favored. Being made at the sewing machine, decorated with wrong motifs on a fabric of poor quality these come very cheap, while one which is hand sewn on home spun fabric that takes about three to four months to finish simply can't compete in terms of pricing and accessibility."(Lina Jucan)

By having the members of the Semne Cusute community realize the effort made in sewing such a traditional *Ie* through their own experiences a gradual reassessment of the financial value these items bare is intended. Ms.Corduneanu goes as far as reconceptualizing the *Ie* as a luxury item and with good sense, considering the fact that most of the membership in the Semne Cusute community consists of middle-aged upper-middle class women, as confirmed by both my own field observations as well as by Ms.Corduneanu herself, who states "as you can see, the vast majority of women who are members of this group are born in the city, have superior education and above average incomes [...]" to which Ms. Jucan adds "[..] I am sure that none of them have to live off this activity [sewing], to earn their daily bread from it. They all do this as a personal past-time." Thus they are the ideal consumer group capable to drive this change due to their above average purchasing power. However, one of the tactics used to this end, the branding of all textile products that are inspired by traditional designs, but do not follow the rigorous good practice rules as layed out by Ms.Corduneanu, as kitsch items, gives the movement a somewhat elitist tone, which has several negative side effects. First, it can scare off potential new members, who might give up on their interest following criticism of their work. Second, it creates conflict between the curated, ideal understanding of the *Ie* professed by many members of the group and the organically developed models that peasants sew, the result of their limited efforts at continuing their heritage under the very unfavorable conditions of communist collectivization. Lastly, such a broad assumption of inferior quality tarnishes the creations of prestigious international as well as Romanian fashion designers such as Yves Saint Laurent or Tom Ford who used traditional designs as the source of inspiration for luxury collections which being heavily marketed reach global audiences, which in turn promotes and creates interest for the source heritage (cf.Ghituleasa et.al. 2014: 64).

Another major problem which Ms. Corduneanu identified and aims to solve through the functions of the community she founded is the severe lack of accurate and systematized representation of elements of traditional heritage reaching the Romanian people through official channels. Thus one of the key roles of the entire project is that of disseminating information pertaining to the *Ie*, its symbols and its cultural value. One very pertinent tactic used to this end is pointing out the importance it receives from foreigners through a carefully orchestrated event involving the collected efforts of the Semne Cusute community, the Romanian diaspora, and major state cultural institutions, which I shall further discuss in Chapter 6.2.

Conclusively, the way that Ms.Corduneanu has infused her observations and lessons from analyzing both Romanian as well as Western society into the fabric and guiding principles of the Semne Cusute community, which are reflected in its mode of operation, goals and functions, defines the movement as both Nativistic (it categorically rejects all imitations it labels as kitsch); Revivalistic (it strongly emphasizes the return to the distinct forms the Ia had during the late nineteenth century which it considers its stylistic apogee); as well as Vitalistic (it does not reject the lessons learnt abroad and tries to adopt best practice examples even if their origins are alien) in nature.

In the next chapter I shall describe the various forms the Semne Cusute idea underwent since its inception to its current state and provide insight into what its main functions are.

6.1. Structure and function

The first step towards establishing what would later become a successful revitalization movement after the confirmation of potential received in Berlin was the opening of the online blog page Semne Cusute in the summer of 2012.

On the Semne Cusute blog's landing page we can find the motto of its founder which can be interpreted as the mission statement of the future community, as it describes the reasons for her work, the type of work she does and an invitation to participate extended to all the visitors of her webpage.

"The sewn signs [literal translation of: Semne Cusute] are an alphabet that speaks about us: what we used to believe in, love, what we were and could be. The motifs and their purpose were RIGHTEOUSLY passed down from generation to generation. I collect them with CARE and draw them ATTENTIVELY, in hopes that you will carry them onwards with RESPECT."
(URL: 25)

Hereby, the purpose of the blog becomes evident, it is meant to be a purveyor of topical knowledge relevant to the subject matter, for future generations to enjoy. The format of the information is adapted to a contemporary standards of presentation, namely as a digital freely available storage accessible online via a simple google search. It functions as an archive, "a digital encyclopedia of traditional symbols"(Ioana Corduneanu).



Figure 39: Graphic card with isolated motif from Bukovina available online on the Semne Cusute blog.

In regards to the sources being referenced, these encompass artistic, technical and ethnographic albums published exclusively in the first decades of the last century, one of the primary sources being Kolbenhayer's previously described monograph. When asked whether the traditional dress models used to source and compile the archive and define the regional specificities in design, ornament, motifs and coloring also reference variants in actu, Ms.Corduneanu acknowledged that only a small sample originates from her own collecting activities. Therefore, it is clear that the main function of the Semne Cusute blog is to present the Romanian traditional rural dress from a historical reconstructivist point of view, as an idealized version of itself based on the pre-selection of the finest examples, namely, exclusively richly decorated and finely crafted festive pieces.

By describing her efforts as careful and attentive, the founder of the blog shows that she is aware of the fact that she is dealing with delicate and valuable objects and information while also acknowledging indirectly her own position as an outsider who still has a long way ahead of her until she can claim expertise in the field. Indeed Ms. Corduneanu repeatedly confirms that her knowledge in matters folklore and textile traditions is all self-taught and mentions that "I took the decision to go forward with my plans [for opening the blog where she collected models to the public] only after returning from Chişinău, where I had a long

discussion with Ms. Varvara Buzilă, the Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Chişinău, and she sort of gave me her approval to go forward with it." (ibid)

What exactly were her concerns? Ms. Corduneanu explains:

"No, not really, they hardly did any sewing in the villages. There are very few places left where ahh, [...] only in areas very far from the city. [...] through my actions I intervened in the natural course of the local cultural [meaning here traditional textile crafts] development. We can observe how this process would have continued if we look at the regions of Maramureş and Oaş, where people are not receptive to this trend [of revitalizing the dress] because they maintain their own. Namely, they want their traditional dress developing according to their own vision and they no longer are interested in rewinding these developments [...] Based on these two examples we can see towards what this natural development would have lead across the country. Towards [...] everything ready made and store bought imports from China, bridal dresses worn inappropriately by old women, in stead of traditional colored beads using Swarovski crystals." (Ioana Corduneanu)

It is evident that Ms. Corduneanu assumed her role of reformer very aware of the nation-wide developments which she categorically rejects as displays of decadence in both understanding of the solemn function the dress used to have as well as in the overall lifestyle choices, with people more concerned with comfort and the faking of patina rather than its careful but laborious maintenance. Nonetheless, we can also identify some contradictory statements, that inform the key questions I have raised: Is the general assumption, held by the vast majority of the members of Semne Cusute, that the traditional textile crafts, in particular sewing, have died out, true? A belief which, clearly is not entirely accurate, yet Ms. Corduneanu effectively uses it as a galvanizing point especially in her presentations to diaspora communities as was the case during the 2015 event in Vienna, which I attended. In doing so, the level of psychological stress is increased, making the likely hood of gaining new followers when she proposes her idea of a collective revitalization effort exponential. The fact that the real change being proposed with Semne Cusute concerns a reversion of existing handcraft practice to an idealized historical form, that intellectual elites considered and continue to do so, aesthetically superior, is, however, secondary to the typical goals the leaders of revitalization movements generally assume, namely, enabling "new capacities for action and for regulating the action of others [while at the same time] looking for new ways to exercise authority and a new ethos to regulate their own conduct as elites." (Swidler 1986:280)

I found confirmation of this conscious distinction and self-prescribed status of cultural elite that is a recurring characteristic of revitalizing agents embedded in the language used by Ms.Corduneanu to describe her work:

"this trend is starting to catch up now in the rural areas as well, but only after the example set by the urban, and not the other way round. So that means that this proces [the revitalization of the dress according to distinct historical criteria] propagated itself not from the peasant to the city, but the other way round, because it was the elites who started it, and slowly it diffused downwards." (Ioana Corduneanu)

Furthermore, displaying knowledge of the fact that her reformist goals could be faced with opposition and rejection, especially by people living in the rural countryside and even more so by those from the furthest provinces of the country who will not lightly accept her authority on the matter due to her intellectual background (university education, descent from family of gentry rather than peasants) and her roots in the capital of the country, is a prerequisite for the movement to adapt to contention and conflict. Bucharest is a symbol that for many across Romania is negatively charged due to it representing the brute force of the government despotism of the communist period as well as due to the latent perception of its native citizens as exclusivist and temperamental, giving the above concern validity. I encountered such opposition expressed by members of her own movement while meeting them in the villages of Bukovina. One of my key informants offered following commentary:

"Miss Corduneanu, I have nothing against her personally, but you can't barge into things [...] to step over someone else's work. She may be a very good architect, but if she wants to claim that she's knowledgeable in this, she should learn folklore, study ethnography. You can't be an architect and come tell me, a simple peasant woman from Dorna how to sew myself a traditional Dorna shirt. I sew the regional Dorna model because I can go to the old village women and ask them how they used to sew it and they will show me." (Nicoleta Irimescu)

As much as this critique raises valid points and demonstrates the artificiality of the entire endeavor by revealing its dialectic nature, the Ia, an element of clothing with a very long history of usage in diverse contexts by diverse peoples is redefined based on the aesthetic sensibilities of a group of people with little tangible relation to the rural world. And yet, this is exactly the crux that explains the success of the Semne Cusute project, namely, its appeal to the large demographic that indeed no longer has or never had contact with the village reality from Bukovina, or any other region from Romania for that matter.

By choosing to ignore this fact in her refutation of the validity of the information on the Semne Cusute blog, Ms. Irimescu exposes her own privileged position in regards to the original sources and thus her bias. A fact that another interlocutor living in the largest city in Bukovina and regional coordinator of the local branch of Semne Cusute does not hesitate to point out:

"[...] you live here in the village where you have access to your dowry chest, you can see what people are sewing. Me on the other hand, live in the city - so I don't get to see whether people are sewing nor what they are sewing. In the big city, in Suceava, when I walk around all I see worn and advertised are industrially made textiles and machine sewn embroidery. "
(Monica Balatchi)

She also laments the lack of modern communication channels informing the general public about the traditional crafts collections locked in the vaults of the state funded regional ethnographic museum. This is a recurring problem that I can also attest, as my field stay proved the fact that most museums are, due to a variety of reasons, antiquated in both presentation, as well as public relations, with some being very hard to find due to a complete lack of directions.

"Why couldn't I find any information written by the specialists at the ethnographic museum? Why doesn't the museum have a website? Because I and many like me are searching for this information online, I simply lack the time to wander through all the villages and search for the old seamstresses to show me their work. Besides I wouldn't know where to begin, as I do not know of any." (ibid.)

The Semne Cusute blog is to this end the only comprehensive digital archive for this rich heritage and its success is in large parts owed to the fact that the state run institutions tasked with the public dissemination of this information are mostly failing at this task. Underfunded and understaffed the ethnographic museums in Romania are a vestige from the past that survives only through the dedication of their curators while largely neglected by the political authorities. This leaves considerably numerous and valuable ethnographic collections, compiled during the Soviet rule as part of their research into evidence for pre-Christian origins, slowly decaying in the archives and storage facilities of these museums thus robbing the Romanian public of access to their own heritage. The feedback loop between this institutional infrastructure and the Semne Cusute community generates interesting strategies of action such as the widely popular sewing contest Ia Aidoma, which next to having been an

exceedingly effective public relations booster, reaching wide national and international coverage, also unified the disparate subgroups within the community by providing them with a solitary goal to achieve that due to its high degree of complexity naturally favored extensive networking and resource management. I shall go into further detail about the Ia Aidoma project in the next chapter.

Structurally coupled with the blog via active content links is an online shop called Perpetual Icons (cf.URL: 27). Here is evidenced how Ms.Corduneanu integrates strategies of action adopted from examples seen abroad, in this case the commercialization of an element of tradition while retaining its capacity as a signifier of historical continuity and ethnic identity, into the ethos of the Semne Cusute movement without jeopardizing the integrity of her own ideological claims. The products offered for sale are called KITs. These are small cardboard boxes containing pictures of one of the models of Ie from the blog, detailed closeups of the decorative motifs on the individual structural elements of the Ie, textual instructions on what sewing and embroidery techniques are best suited for the particular model as well as enough raw material, appropriately qualitative fabrics and thread of local, Romanian, production for the completion of one shirt. Every kit is presented in the shop page with a fully disclosed source of origin, both in terms of region, to which part of Romania was this model native during the historical period of reference adopted by Semne Cusute, as well as considering the source where Ms.Corduneanu extracted the decorative pattern from, I.E. which monograph, art or technical album, museum exhibit etc. was used as point of reference.

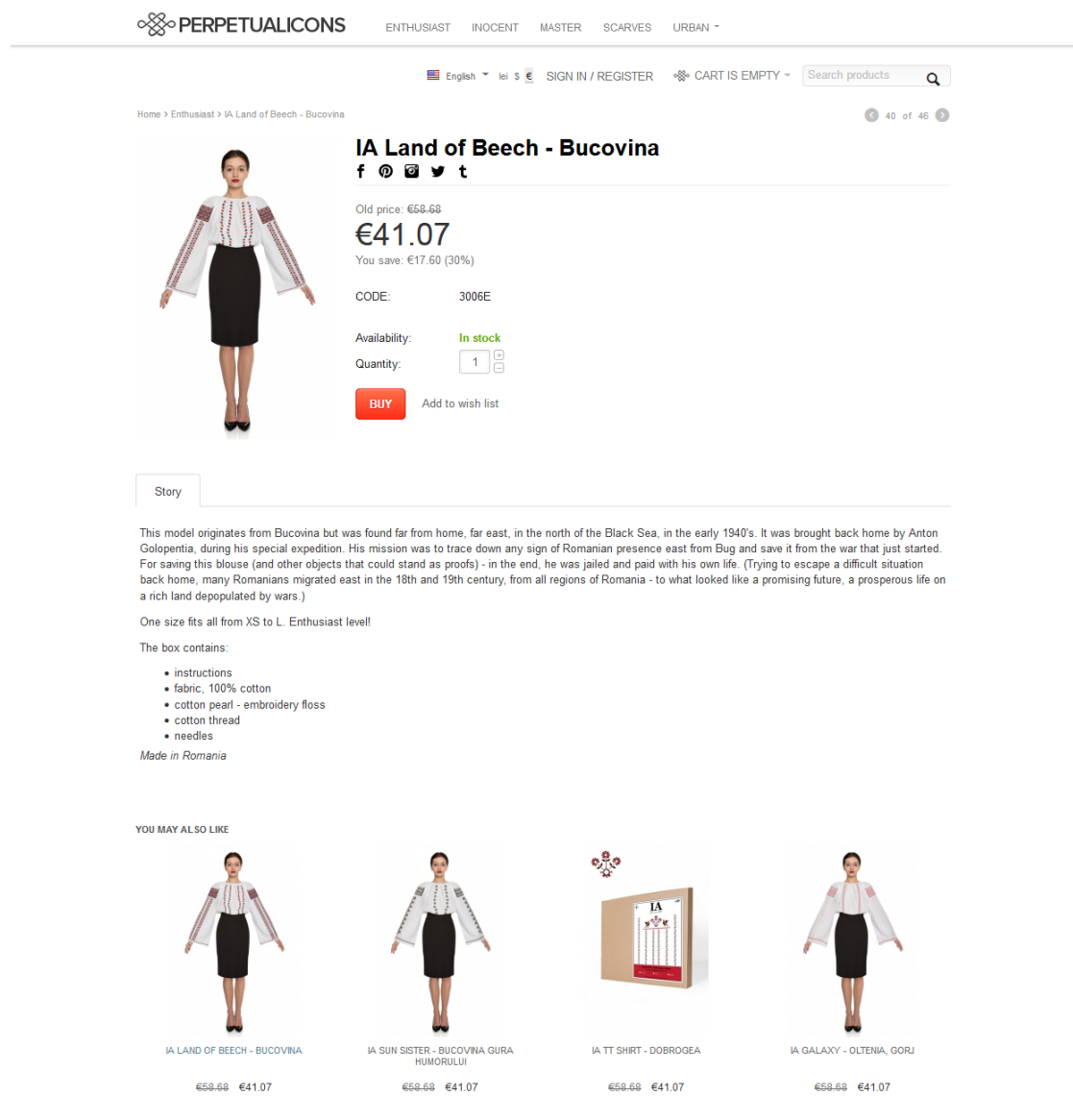


Figure 40: Ia Land of Beech Bukovina DIY Kit storefront screenshot

How does running a profit oriented shop that effectively commercializes heritage conceptually fit in with one of the dedicated goals stated by the founder of the community, namely countering mass consumerism? It does so through the design of its product. For Ms.Corduneanu the kit is less of a product than it is an instrument to further the desired transition towards home manufacture and away from fast consumption of industrially ready-made products. It is a natural extension of the blog because it further regulates the actions of its followers. By offering people who develop an interest for the Ia from reading the stories on the blog, the option to buy a sort of pre-packed Ia they merely need to assemble together at home, that however, comes with the warranty of following all the imposed standards of quality and authenticity, she effectively reduces the likely-hood of people seeking to gratify

this need via other sources such as fashion stores or trade markets which sell almost exclusively modern shirts that are either imported or do not follow any of the historical principles of craftsmanship. Therefore by running a shop like this, Ms.Corduneanu effectively fulfills one of the primary tasks of any revitalizing agent, namely the organization of the habits of its followers towards a desired end. The kit in this case is transformed into a different type of symbol, it no longer is perceived as a product, but it becomes a tool used to remedy a societal problem, the oversaturation of the Romanian consumer with cheap, low quality imported goods due to the complete lack of appreciation for or knowledge about handcrafts and their guiding principles. Buying a kit therefore becomes an act of personal rebellion against the imported standards of capitalist societies from the West and an affirmation of conscious, some would call it even, ethical, consumption that fosters the local over the global, the handmade over the industrial, quality over quantity and most importantly cherish individuality not for its promise of disembeddedness but for its capacity to facilitate nostalgia through repetition. As much as fighting against the invasion of kitsch products and the kitsch lifestyle, which they define based solely on their own elitist narrow list of exclusively material criteria, such as shoddy manufacture, low quality or inappropriately used raw materials, consumerism instead of handcraft, while excluding entirely the conceptual cocoon that is the need of conventionality from which kitsch emerges, is the proverbial call to arms of the Semne Cusute community, my analysis demonstrates that the meanings associated with the kit make it into the embodiment of the particularity of the kitsch aesthetic, namely "a celebration [...] of a more modest humanity [which] at its core [...] wages a modest war on the cosmic importance attributed by high culture to the autonomy and singularity of the modern 'disembedded' individual"(Binkley 2000: 141f).

After successfully managing her blog for two years while expanding its range of contents to cover not only the drawn decorative motifs, but also include traditional sewing and embroidery techniques, Ms.Corduneanu inspired by the high quality of work that the regular readers of her page created, took the decision in March 2014 to launch the first online șezătoare.

"When Emily Er sent me pictures of her first Ia, sewn after models published on my blog, I knew the seeds I planted started blossoming, so then in March 2014 with the coming of spring I started the online șezătoare. Since then I've been host to 11.000 [at the beginning of my field research the membership counted 13.600] women (but also men) who are interested in sewing

their own shirt. [...] There we debate, we council, we critique, we praise, we encourage eachother." (Corduneanu in Gutierrez 2016)

The online șezătoare called " SEMNE CUSUTE în acțiune" (translated as Semne Cusute, sewn signs, in action) is hosted on the social media platform facebook.com in the form of a world-wide publically accessible group.



Figure 41: SEMNE CUSUTE în acțiune facebook group landing page with description of activities, membership requirements and community standards.

The Romanian term șezătoare is in this sense not an alternate name for the community but has a utilitarian and descriptive function, letting people know what the main activities within this group would be. Șezătoare is an old Romanian expression that represents the age old winter tradition where villagers used to gather together to do handiwork, share stories, eat, drink play dance and engage in all the range of communal activities that would foster solidarity, social integration and ultimately the growth of the community. Similarly to the traditional source, the online șezătoare is not meant to be a work environment nor an expert forum to discuss technical details about the craft, even though technical discussion threads are certainly present, but as Ms.Corduneanu herself explains its main goal is to foster the

growth of the community as first of all a functioning social network that could rehabilitate the breakup of communitarian structures during the first decades of Westernization.

"[...] this is why I called it 'in action' because if need be [...] considering that we created this online group let us truly function as a team, so that if one of us is faced with problems, let us all help out and if everyone contributes a little bit, just like little bees gathering crumbs, we can turn them into a mountain. [...] So the blog is for admiring, studying but when you're ready to take action, you join the Semne Cusute în acțiune group. But with action we do not imply only sewing, because that's why I didn't want to call it "sewing group", I called it "in action" because we get involved. Because we made Mărțișoare [this is a trinket which can take any form but its main feature must consist of a red and white interwoven string, which symbolizes the rebirth of nature in spring, and is traditionally gifted on the 1st of March (cf. URL:28) to act as a protective and good luck charm] and took them to the communities on the Dniester and we will keep doing things, make donations, it's all about becoming engaged in some meaningful projects together." (Ioana Corduneanu)

The facebook group was meant to develop a community that is supportive of its members to an extent that goes beyond the narrow scope of the shared interest in traditional garments, to be an informal network that helps people when faced with difficulty by pooling resources to find practical solution or simply by offering much needed psychological relief.

"often times we discuss very personal topics, we share life advice or we use the professional knowledge of our fellows. For example one of our members is a psychotherapist and there were times when she was asked by other ladies from the group to give her professional opinion on certain events in their lives. What I'm trying to say is that there certainly is a elevated degree of intimacy in this community." (Sonia Vert)

Furthermore, because no social movement can exist in a bubble hermetically sealed off from its environment, the members of Semne Cusute are encouraged to engage with the socio-cultural and even political reality of Romanian and even global society and at times use their widespread public reach to express support for or criticism of various processes, events, trends or developments happening across the world.

It is very interesting to observe the careful semiotic management of the complex and often multilayered meanings the Ia is infused with when the Semne Cusute community engages in such public campaigns of active ideological dissemination, especially fascinating were two distinct social engagement campaigns the community organized: one a charitable effort as a public response to a national tragedy the other a sewing contest with the goal of recreating

rare pieces of Ie which were expatriated during the last century to cultural institutions across the world thus raising important questions of ownership, cultural heritage [mis]management while expanding the international attention the movement garners. A more in depth analysis of the symbolic and strategic dimensions of these two events and their relevance in the cultural revitalization process follows in the next chapter.

6.2. Public Outreach

In previous chapters I have argued that culture is a complex network of meaning that is by design both symbolic, it allows people to share experiences via a mutually agreed upon framework of reference that binds the conceptual to the perceptual, therefore enabling communication, as well as functional, it enables the development of appropriate behavioral responses to existential problems. Any entity that engages with culture must therefore do so on a semiotic level as well as a structural one, it must analyze the relationship between experience and manifest, observable reality and overlap that with the patterns of activity people engage in so as to verify the degree of cohesion that exists within the network. Since culture is entirely processual the maintenance or destabilization of this consistency becomes the main task of cultural operators, who must continually adapt their tactics to ensure the success of their task. To this end, they must develop extremely fine tuned observational capabilities to scan for any changes in the pool of human experience that informs the entire semiotic superstructure. Although from the perspective of an agent seeking to reformulate culture according to their ethos change is desirable, effective revitalization can only succeed if the desired transformation has the potential to become routine and be adopted on a large scale. For this to occur the total commitment of the core followers is not sufficient, effective and emotionally charged external communication must be pursued. At this stage in the revitalization sequence the symbolic dimensions that inform the desired new culture are symbiotically tied to any experience that has mass appeal.

During my time spent with members of the Semne Cusute community I could observe two such instances of a very conscious, very organized and thoroughly tactical forms of public outreach or mass dissemination campaigns.

The first was called "ii pentru HANI" (cf. URL: 29). This was a fund raising campaign with the goal of raising money to be donated to Hani Haifwai, one of the survivors of a devastating fire that broke out during a concert on the 30th of October 2015 in one of Bucharest' famous clubs, "Club Colectiv". The fire claimed the lives of 64 young adults and teenagers and

hospitalized another 150. The tragedy was intensified by the inefficient response from emergency crews. From the horrifying witness accounts investigators concluded that the club was running with almost complete disregard for safety regulations although it held valid operating license issued by city council just months before. When questioned about issuing permits without proper verification of the security and safety measures the mayor of the district initially proved uncooperative, which led to an immediate popular backlash and massive street protests in most major Romanian cities that eventually led to the resignation of the government on the 4th of November 2015.

"Dubbed in the Romanian press the **#Colectiv Revolution**, the protests were held to demand the resignations of Prime Minister Victor Ponta [...] and the Mayor of Sector 4 who was criticized for giving an operating license to the club without a permit from the fire department. [...] The protesters chanted "shame on you" and "assassins", and carried banners reading 'corruption kills'." (URL 30)

Perhaps the most notable feature of these protests was their use of digital social media platforms to better network the population, spread information about the event in real time and engender collective action independently without relying on a hierarchical chain of command. Details about the fire, the investigation, witness accounts and other information gathered by citizen journalists, were pooled from disparate online platforms into a common digital archive using the #Colectiv hashtag as a topical marker. Thus the hashtag system works via the snowball effect gaining momentum with each new addition while also providing the platform for anyone to potentially reach a large public audience without having to pass through any institutional hurdles, the only prerequisite being access to the internet.

What exactly was "ii pentru HANI"?

It was primarily designed as an internal event for the *Semne Cusute în acțiune* group with the purpose of bringing the community together to serve a good cause by organizing and running an internal auction where members would offer the shirts they sewed for sale to each other with the proceeds being donated to the medical care of Hani.

Because "ultimately structural and historical opportunities determine which strategies and thus which cultural system succeed" (cf. Swidler 1986: 284) the revitalizing agent, the leader of the movement must constantly be ready to adapt to changes in the broader cultural network and adopt strategies that may have never been part of the revitalization process. An example

for such a task is demonstrated by appropriating the #Colectiv hashtag. Using it as a descriptive marker in the discussion threads where the bidding for the items took place the symbolic dimension of the Ia and thus implicitly of the community creating and using it expanded and activated a number of latent interpretative avenues.

What are the symbolic dimensions of the Ia that were actively used during this cultural project and how did they reinforce the desired strategies of action?

Soliciting the members to put their own creations up for auction Ms.Corduneanu reinforced the perception of the Ia as a luxury item and progressed with developing an understanding of the Ia as a product that normally requires a higher financial commitment. By requesting members to give up shirts which took months to create from scratch, the emotional internalization of the value of the time spent producing them becomes far stronger, therefore generating understanding and even compassion for the few remaining handcraft masters trying to sell their wares in the country but hardly managing to keep up with the price dumping of wholesale retailers.

“The festive shirts, you don’t really want to [ahm ..] when you sew at an Ia, and there are some ladies who spent a whole year sewing theirs, then the shirt turns into something special. [...] and this is exactly what we are trying to promote here, to make people understand that the models we sew were exclusive, they were taken from festive clothing used only for very special occasions. Therefore, the Ia has its higher value, it’s not something you take and wear just like that, it’s a luxury.” (Ioana Corduneanu)

Furthermore, the auction also increased work incentive. The appreciation and recognition of those members whose shirts sold for high prices elevated their status in the community making them role models for those who were less motivated to invest the rather large amount of time in this undertaking. Therefore, the event also functioned to consolidate the promoted habits, skills and modes of cooperation in the consciousness of the members further organize the followers into structural categories, each ascribed different roles and responsibilities within the movement. This is why "an 'either-or view' is particularly ill suited for understanding urban movements, as they typically transgress such dichotomies. Rather than 'either-or', urban movements are typically 'both and', being multifunctional in nature, at once practically oriented and oppositional" (Jacobsson 2015: 5).

From the point of view of the mass audience, the Ia re-gained a different yet equally as important and historically accurate meaning. It represented, as the symbols embroidered in its

decorations imply, nurturing, rebirth, rejuvenation and protection from harm. Its apotropaic power was fully revitalized in the perceptions of many and functioned as a strong motivator for acquiring one of the auctioned items, because the people who bought them were endowed with the same beneficial attributes the *Ie* was believed to have, thus granting prestige and admiration. The "ii pentru HANI" project ultimately demonstrated the validity of the postulate from Chapter 3 regarding the prerequisites for the functioning of a network based on symbolic exchange. The commercialization of the handmade shirts in the auction was effective as a symbolic device because it made sense of experience. The call to action spurred the community to involve themselves in the national efforts to provide aid for the survivors of the tragedy, thus the *Ie* became a conceptual framework through which an existential threat was processed. The *Ie*, traditionally representing the highest aesthetic aspirations functioned as the emotional and visual counterpoint to the horrific imagery depicting the scarred and burned survivors. Furthermore, because it is mutually intelligible, everyone in Romania can recognize the *Ie*, therefore, even if many can not distinguish between regional variations, the *Ie* fulfilled this role as a commodity through its mass appeal. By creating positive synergies between the community and the rest of the society, by emphasizing a proactive attitude and social responsibility, the event generated behavior appropriate to the environment.

Another group project with a dedicated communicative function was "IA Aidoma". The concept of this project rested on the re-appropriation of select pieces of traditional clothing which throughout the course of the last century were removed from Romania to end up in the permanent collections of various museums world-wide. The Romanian archaic term 'aidoma' means similar or alike and it describes the gist of the project.

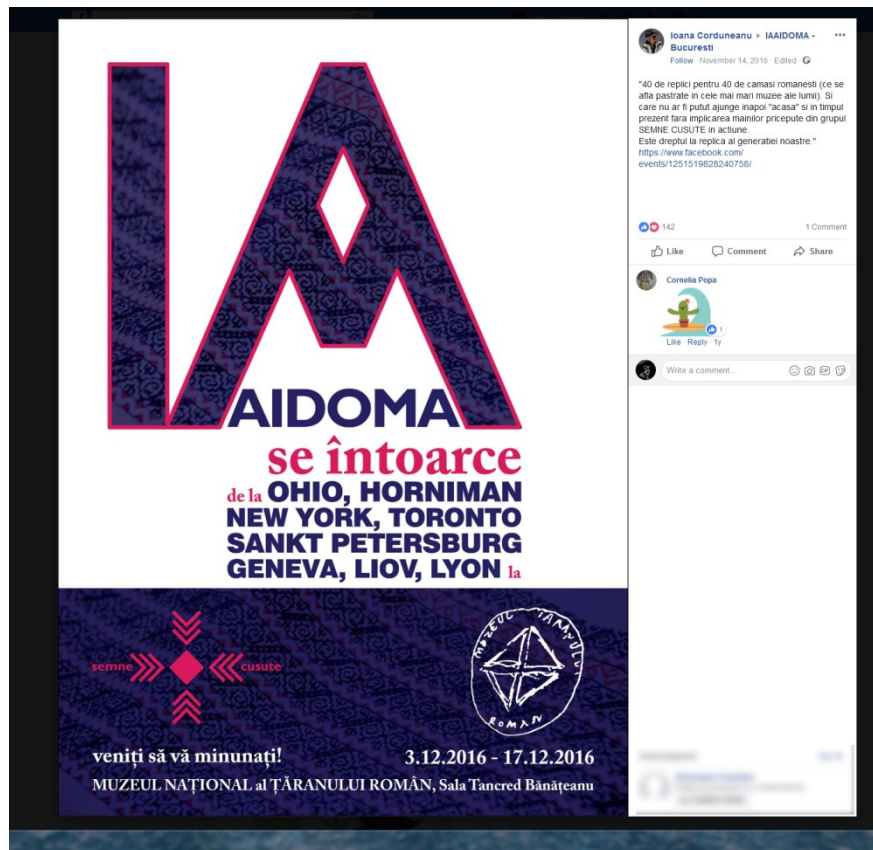


Figure 42: IA Aidoma exhibition poster, screenshot

With "IA Aidoma" the Semne Cusute community set about to return home, i.e. back to Romania, 40 traditional shirts that could otherwise not be safely transported back to the country due to their either fragile material structure or their complicated legal situation, by creating historically accurate replicas. In doing so they wish to reveal to the Romanian people masterpieces of their textile heritage which otherwise are not be publically displayed as they are sealed in the depots of international museums (cf. URL 31). However, the action was addressed primarily as an indirect assessment of the failures of Romanian cultural institutions. It aimed its critique towards the fact that Romanian museums hardly display traditional textiles while also offering little information for the public about the contents of their collections, thus effectively performing an intransparent public policy, which negatively affects people's capacity to judge traditional textile heritage effectively while denying them access to their own heritage.

"I was very upset that our museums almost never display the shirts from their depots, because it is very difficult for them to do so. They [the shirts] are not restored, the restoration departments are understaffed, they have no adequate working conditions and it is very difficult to publically display these shirts until you've restored them to their proper conditions.

You have to clean them, patch them up etc. people wants to see them beautifully." (Ioana Corduneanu)

Nevertheless, the project did not have the sole scope of institutional critique but it sought to establish a structural link between the Semne Cusute movement and the very institutions it wishes to admonish. How was this achieved?

The first step, required the identification of the 40 shirts that would function as models for the newly sewn ones. This task was completed as a group effort, with Ms.Corduneanu having preselected two items from the Ethnographic Museum of Lyon in France, which acted as a guideline for the stylistic, qualitative and material assessment of other candidates. By not imposing all the examples herself, but integrating the community into a collective effort, Ms.Corduneanu effectively reiterated the typology of Ie she considers to represent the zenith of textile craftsmanship thus performing an important function in any revitalization movement, namely that of refreshing the awareness of the followers towards the core symbolic forms that determine the scope and identity of the movement. The process of selection was a difficult challenge that tested the commitment of the members to the movement because it was laborious and financially demanding.

"It was very hard [collecting the models from the original shirts], I made two roundtrip journeys to Lyon and one to Geneva, another lady went to St. Petersburg and she took pictures of all the Ii which were on display, another to Horniman in the UK. We were lucky that The Metropolitan Museum displayed some models on their homepage and we could zoom in on the pictures and draw the embroidery patterns from there. For some of them we have background information as well, but for most we don't because it wasn't written." (Ioana Corduneanu)

Creating the replicas provided different difficulties, mainly technical ones. Due to the fact that the chosen models were exclusively from the period at the turn of the nine-teenth to twentieth centuries, many were sewn using antiquated techniques and with materials that were difficult to find such as gilded or silver string. Again in order to accomplish this task the community was required to cooperate, share resources and trade their skills. Acquiring home spun wool and linen fabrics with the correct weft and warp pattern proved to be the greatest challenge in all the groups I visited. Surprisingly the regional groups from Bukovina whose members are coming from mainly the rural region could not acquire home spun materials because as they explained "most peasants sold or destroyed their looms" (Eleonora Lommer).

This prompted one of the members from Bucharest to build herself a historic horizontal loom in her two bedroom city apartment (cf. field diary 27.07.2016).

Consequently we can observe that the appropriation of material artifacts engage the cultural operator with multiple layers of practice and meaning simultaneously, thus activating a high learning curve. Because objects transport multiple meanings that bind them to different categories of time, space and agency as well as to other more or less distant categories of objects, forming an articulated narrative such as the one the Semne Cusute community does implies broadening the conceptual framework to include all the interconnected parameters. Therefore it is not surprising that members develop and pursue interests in a multitude of associated domains, thus tightening the conceptual grip of the community on the traditional textile crafts. Being more or less forced by necessity to expand their skill set towards, in this case, weaving and thread making the interconnectedness between the end product, the *Ie* and the supply chain of materials not only becomes clearer but gradually falls under the control of the community itself. Such an indirect expansion of influence then allows the revitalizing movement to embed itself in even more clusters of agency, which then allows its members to preach their proposed course of action to new groups which initially were not directly targeted. In this case, the direct consequence of the decision to have the linen produced internally was a thoroughly critical assessment of the textile raw materials on the Romanian market leading to the conclusion that much of it was not locally produced. For many this represented a major problem because working to revive the traditional sewing craft as it was practiced during its heyday was a task that conflicted with the availability of raw materials, this in turn accentuated the demand within the group for the KITS offered for sale by Ms.Corduneanu because these were guaranteed to include, even though in very limited amount, locally sourced materials. The problems that are highlighted here demonstrate the high level of interconnectedness that is the trademark of culture as a system.

Following the completion of the home made replicas, the last crucial step in the design of the event as primarily a communication platform was the selection of the medium for public display. The main channel for displaying the results of the work were the Semne Cusute online and social media pages, the blog, the main facebook page as well as the multitude of groups, subpages and forums run by the various regional subgroups affiliated to the movement, all ran a centrally advised PR campaign. This included posting 40 collages displaying the picture of the newly made replica overlayed atop a picture of the original blouse with a freely composed text that however, was required to include following two

passages reading: "from New York [insert name of any other city] to Bucharest" and adding the very important line: "Ia AIDOMA is our generation's right to retort" (cf. URL 32).

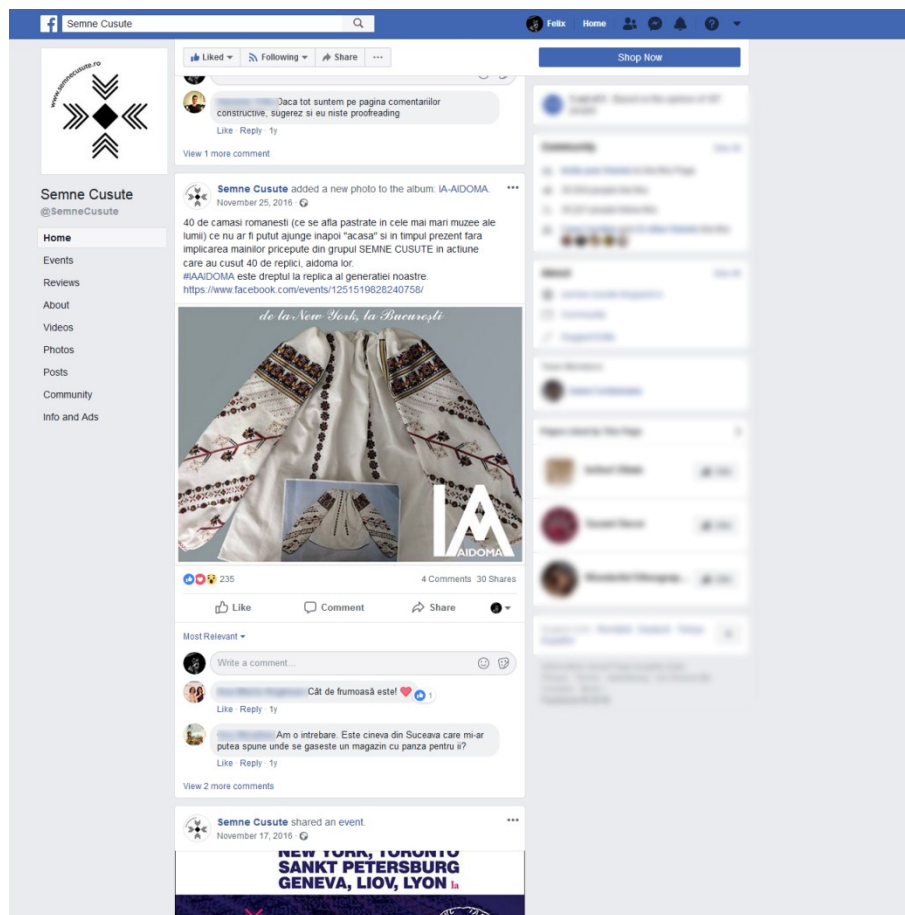


Figure 43: Ia AIDOMA facebook promotional post, screenshot

The wording of these phrases is very suggestive and offers a better understanding of the level of symbolism Ms.Corduneanu is building around the traditional dress in order to communicate and achieve her goals of cultural revitalization.

First, the use of the word our generation to describe not only the members of the community but as a general statement that should apply to the anyone reading the text is indicative of a very communitarian, unifying perspective. The word generation is defined as "a body of living beings constituting a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor" (URL. 33), yet the membership of the Semne Cusute community comprises individuals of many ages ranging on the entire age spectrum, thus they are obviously not part of the same generation in the strict sense. What is implied with the use of the word generation is the shared contemporaneous experience of Romanians living at this point in time and space, and that experience is being embedded in the socio-political context of a rapidly changing society

confronted by both the forces of Westernization as well as its own past, as described in Chapter 6 and Chapter 2.2. The dialectic impact of this word is evident, by braking down the mostly self set conceptual borders setting Semne Cusute members apart from mainstream society, the activity of the group is ascribed to everyone, thus elevating those chosen to represent the idea of a revitalized tradition with their craft objects to messengers of the larger group, working towards the betterment of Romanian society as a whole. Since the 40 shirts that were selected to be part of the final campaign were handpicked by Ms.Corduneanu herself, they confer the authority of publically representing the vision of Semne Cusute to the women who have sewn them. This again corresponds to the task of choosing 'apostles' or disciples any cultural reformer is by necessity required to perform (cf.Wallace 1956: 274f). Through the multiplication of people conferred such privileged status, with each taking individual measures to further advertise the event due to the desire to showcase their own work and craftsmanship the public reach of the initial message is exponentially increased.

Describing Ia AIDOMA as a "right to retort" highlights the strong self awareness of the group and its identity based on empathy with the collective historical trauma of the Romanian people, who, for the last half century under communist dictatorship were not allowed freedom of self-expression and who, today, in light of the growing cultural dominance of the West are seeking a place of equal standing the their fellow Europeans. By positing this self ascribed right to give form to a collective desire of self-affirmation the Semne Cusute community emphasizes the fact that it is important to define ones place in the global cultural flows that characterize contemporary globalized society and that they are conscious that "material culture is the medium of discourse by which social relations are negotiated and reproduced" (Barrett 1989: 305 in: Kienlin and Widura 2014: 36). Furthermore, this also highlights the subtle political undertones the movement regularly adopts with their public displays. Claiming the right of retort in a matter that is of international concern and thus bypassing state protocols and institutional procedures within the established transnational cooperation guidelines the movement assumes the role of an active agent of civil society which circumstantially defines itself in a relational position to the presumed passive state authority as an active agent.

Finally, the positioning of the Semne Cusute community in relation to the criticized public institutions is to be considered. Possibly the most striking feature of the Ia AIDOMA event was the fact that the replicas, due to the efforts of Ms.Corduneanu in establishing a rapport with the curators, ended up being exhibited in the halls of the Muzeul Țăranului Român the

most prestigious ethnographic museum in the country. Ia AIDOMA therefore did not alienate or create a conflict of interest with the criticized institutions but was recognized as a valuable addition to the current ethnographic discourse on the topic of cultural heritage management and its appropriation.

Conclusively it is apparent that

"[...] positioning urban movements as facing the choice of either co-optation or remaining radical and progressive is not helpful either, as also groups seeking collaboration with institutional actors often combine this with claim-making and contestation in different forms." (Jacobsson 2015: 5).

Another form of social praxis that the Semne Cusute movement engendered and which they contest against its historic form is the urban Șezătoare, a particular form of social gathering that, due to the established popular discourse is widely believed to be conceptually tied with the practice of handcrafts. I shall explore the parallels and divergencies between the historical and the revived forms of this practice in the next chapter.

6.3. The "Șezătoare"

Shortly after its founding in 2014 the online community moved from the realm of cyberspace and gradually started organizing itself into local groups hosting regularly scheduled physical meetings, which similarly to the social media sewing group and in apparent continuation of an age old tradition, where named Șezătoare (pl. Șezători). Held originally in Bucharest this format of group meetings was soon present in most big Romanian cities. Here the members meetup, teach themselves the old crafting techniques, showcase their latest creations and depending on the location of the meeting put on a public performance of an authentic șezătoare. But what exactly does that mean when compared with the historical sources?

„Besides all of these, there was that delightful habit of the peasants which extends far back into bygone centuries, the șezătoare. By this custom families met at this or that man's house to spin, or to take grain from the cob, or to do whatever work could be done collectively. The master of the house provided the food and entertainment, such as music for songs and dances. Young and old gathered to do the work and also to have a good time, and at these meetings the older men and women related the old tales and the legends that have for generations kept Romanian culture alive. It was this which made the șezătoare more important than similar gatherings which exist for a time on the frontier of a new nation and die out when the need for

them is past. In Romania was not merely a matter of combining work which needed many hands with a social gathering for which there might not be any other time available. It was more than that. It was a means of preserving the individuality of a whole people. Thus through the centuries national history and literature and music have passed by word of mouth from generation to generation, and without books both language and faith have been kept alive. History has not come to the Romanian by way of study in the classroom, but at the fireside of his humble dwelling, as he listened in the evening by candlelight, in an atmosphere of good will and intimacy, to the respected voice of some loved one. History to him is not something he has studied but is part of his most intimate life, a conscious heritage." (Princess Ileana of Romania 1952 in: URL 34)

This description of the custom is evidently idealized considering that first of all the source is a member of royalty who given the rigors of social hierarchy wouldn't have attended such a village gathering. Furthermore, considering that the statement was given to foreign press it bears to consider that Princess Ileana idealized the description in order for it to be representative of a wide range of cultural characteristics of the Romanian village life, which would not necessarily accurately reflect the reality of peasant life. Nevertheless, we learn that the tradition of organizing some form of gathering with the purpose of bringing together villagers to engage in a range of informal social practices with a deliberately communitarian function has a long and continuous history. Furthermore, the *șezătoare* is described as an inclusive event which did not impose restrictions on attendance or activities, which are presented to as both productive, such as craft making as well as leisure. The description of the general atmosphere of the event is presented as distinctly festive in nature, it falls hard to believe that the *șezătoare* was indeed a place of communal labor, but much more a gathering with a jovial and intimate tone. Indeed, the idea of craft making, especially embroidery or stitching that requires maximum concentration, taking place in an environment filled with all sorts of perceptual distractions seems odd and unlikely. Furthermore, we know that traditionally the *șezătoare* was held online in winter time after sunset and it was an indoors event. This would severely hamper the productivity of any person attempting to engage in delicate needlework due to the uneven lighting conditions of a large room lit by candle light. Taking also into account that these were the very few occasions where young teenage men and women would be able to meet and spend time together, where "the girls would be appraised by the boys [...] where the young would fall in love with each other and where marriages would be planned." (Brie 2011) The selective appropriation of history is laid bare in the popular perception of the *șezătoare* as it was used by the intellectual elites as an all

encompassing representation of the idealized village setting populated by visually representative, hard-working and virtuous peasants ready to function as role models for the virtues of a productive communitarian life at a moment's notice. Such are the features that render the lasting power of the romanticized perspective on the village setting and its social functions a highly useful semiotic tool for cultural revivalist movements such as the Semne Cusute community, which as I shall describe in the following chapter effectively use the representative power of the *Ie* as a tool to deliberately stage their meetings in emotionally charged theatrical ways when the effort guarantees them a large audience. However, there is a striking discrepancy between the way in which they perform a *șezătoare* publically and how it is enacted during their regular meetings. The function and scope of the *Ie* is similarly divergent not only between the public and private meeting but adopts various constellations of meanings that are particular to the regional and localized social realities experienced by members of different Semne Cusute groups. The discrepancies in use, appropriation and degree of identification with the *Ie* and the goals of the movement that I have observed during my field study are most evident when comparing the practice of the core group from Bucharest with those of the regional subgroups from Bukovina. Considerations on these differences are the topic of the next chapter.

6.3.1. The Capital vs the Province

On 27th July 2016 at around 6pm I found myself standing in front of the wood and glass doors of a trendy *anti-café* in Bucharest.

"An **anti-café** (sometimes called a **pay-per-minute café** or a **time club**) is a type of public business that became popular around 2011 in Russia. Unlike a normal café, the primary purpose an anti-café is intended to serve is communication rather than consumption, but as in a regular café customers can order tea, coffee, or other beverages. Customers pay for time spent in the anti-café rather than for these additional facilities." (URL 35)

It was the venue for the weekly *șezătoare* of the core Semne Cusute group and by all standards it thoroughly signaled upscale, expensive and exclusive. The recycled wood furniture, the unconventional layout of the rooms part library, part bar and part music hall and the four Euro per hour "rent" I had to pay to be allowed to attend already clued me in to the outlook and social standing of the people who selected this venue as their meeting space. Being acutely aware of the latest trends and fashions occupies a central position in the preoccupations of the women I was about to meet. As I was heading towards the auditorium at the back of the locale I couldn't quite picture the scene of a myriad group of women dressed

in peasants dress sitting together and sewing in a decorum that reminded more of a hip hotel lounge than the simple yet quaint peasant dwelling that is typical of the countryside homes. To my surprise, though, the group of posh middle aged ladies I met and spent the next five hours with were fitting in the general decorum to an almost perfect match. Sporting elegant summer dresses with broad rimmed wide summer hats while the younger ones donned narrow low cut jeans with the latest sneakers brand and tank top T-shirts the ladies in the room displayed their upper social status and keen eye for fashion with self confidence and pride, yet to my surprise not one traditional garb in sight. Upon closer inspection of the room the only piece hinting towards the identity of the group were the multitude of layers of white hemp, linnen and cotton fabrics and threads spilling out of overfilled bags littering the cushioned hardwood benches and the working tables spread accross the room as well as a pair of unfinished shirts that were being passed from hand to hand by the ladies attracting zealous commentary. The main topics of discussion, next to lively stories recounted from their summer holidays, most of which were spent abroad in exotic locations, revolved primarily around the issue of raw materials. The general consensus appeared to be that none of the commercially available linnen was appropriate for the type of sewing techniques described on the Semne Cusute blog. From these discussions it became apparent that they adopted the guidlines presented by Ms.Corduneanu quite dogmatically as they were exceedingly strict in their critique of the sewn blouses, which in their opinion should differentiated themselves both in the quality of used materials as well as in the perfection of the technique from the amateuresque creations found either in shops or at the stands of village markets. Such a dogmatic adherence to the "perfect" ie, namely the ones described by Ms.Corduneanu on her blog, even though it is evident as I have previously demonstrated (see Chapter 6.1) that these represent a very exclusive and narrow fragment of the Romanian textile heritage, suggests that the women I met can have alternte motives for their membership with Semne Cusute, that do not necessarily overlap with the prophessed goals of cultural revitalization. Ms.Corduneanu herself demonstrates that she is aware of the this fact when she explains that:

"I believe that any person needs to set aside some time for personal expression through some artform [...] Many of the women who joined at the beginning were already filling their time with some form of artistic expression, they were doing classes, painting, pottery. If you will ask them today why they joined they will tell tell you stories about their grandmothers, about identity, but I believe everyone needs to express themselves actively and not just be a consumer; and if they then justify it through their grandmother or through a concern for the nation ... uhm. Look if we would start to sew Bulgarian shirts nobody would be talking about

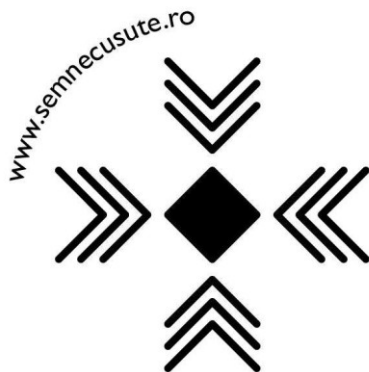
the nation and national pride, they would be talking about the craft, about creating a beautiful object and being exposed to something different, to new colors [...] They do this because they got a feeling for doing, for studying something different other than the job and running the household, and they discovered that there is a world out there filled with colors and stories and beautiful clothes. Come on, we're talking about women here, these [the Ia] are very beautiful clothes afterall. They are a sort of Chanel but from past times." (Ioana Corduneanu)

Thus the habits of the core members display more features of fashionistas rather than of radical traditionalists seeking to divest themselves from contemporaneity by total immersion in the recreation of a bygone lifestyle. Therefore, just as "the only motivations with which fashion is concerned are formal social ones" the concerns expressed by members at the urban *șezătoare* have social distinction as the primary driving force.

Thus the *Ie* for them primarily signifies union with those of the same class and in this case the distinction goes even further because it limits ingroup participation exclusively to those cultivating the highest aesthetic standards, which are reflected in the models collected by Ms.Corduneanu because they reference the most exclusive festive items. The repeated emphatic enunciation stating that "We try to distance ourselves from these amateurs" (field diary 27.07.2016) is indicative of the fact that the *Semne Cusute Ie* is adopted primarily for defining the status and social self of these women, who wish to appear *distingué* in a context where the *Ie* is gaining popularity, is becoming fashionable in the urban context and as such is become increasingly easy to purchase. The real reasons therefore why the *Semne Cusute* movement gained such popularity with the socialite elites in the capital is in fact intricately tied not with alleged concerns about the loss of heritage but the loss of control over the representative function of said heritage. After decades where traditional peasant dress in the city was limited to the private collections of the urban elites the booming trade with imported replicas or home industrially produced shirts threatens their agency as symbols of social demarcation. The only way therefore left for them to partake in the fashion cycle which at the same time would allow them to maintain themselves separate at the upper strata of society was to subject the *Ie* to a semiotic reformulation based on a network of meanings extracted from its historic context, the textile home craft industry of the late nineteenth century. The resulting objects that would be created in accord to this reformulation would segregate the community from the mainstream consumer due to the high economic temporal toll their production demanded, something which is not be feasible for the average Romanian citizen. For the core group of the movement based in the capital of the country, including the founder

of the movement herself, who are the primary figures of authority, attributed with the most capacity to critique the work of everyone who participates in the online discussions and thus enforce the adherence to the group ethos, the Ia represents the "luxury of having time to work every day at a shirt, to not have to work 12 hour daily shifts, but only work 6 hours a day and dedicate 2 hours of your free time to your passion." (Ioana Corduneanu) A condition that is so far removed from the daily reality of the vast majority of Romanians that it almost seems utopian fantasy. This naturally also explains why the only members who are ever able to finish sewing shirts for the various social engagements organized by Ms.Corduneanu such as the ones described in Chapter 6.2 are the same ones. To further enhance their privileged elite status the leadership of the movement and the women who are the one actually affording the time to invest in this handcraft decided to elevate their creations from the mass of traditional shirts via a representative symbol.

Figure 44: Semne Cusute logo, screenshot



"Together with the other ladies we decided to put a *strajă* [protective magic seal] on all our shirts, so if people find our shirts in 100 years they can identify them as belonging to Semne Cusute." (Ioana Corduneanu)

It bears great significance that the introduction of this sigil coincided with the timeframe during which the community engaged most actively in public dissemination campaigns such as the "ia pentru HANI" charity auction and the "Ia AIDOMA" exhibition. This action is not only significant in the identification of the community via its material artifacts, it strengthens the inclusivity of the movement, but it is important in the wider political and historical context. Because of the exceptional timing of this act of branding, the Semne Cusute Ia, can be seen as a trademark that signals the political acts of the community as a whole. The sigil identifies not only the community but embeds the Ia into the political and social fabric of

contemporary Romanian society with an active role. The *Ie* becomes an agent of social change and not merely a passive exhibit neatly preserved from bygone ages.

Thus "we should treat [it] as a medium form which it is always possible to create meaning, rather than a record which is involved in the transmission of meaning." (Barret 1994 in: Kienlin and Widura 2014: 34)

Another feature of the urban *șezătoare* that emphasizes the tendency of the entire group towards differentiation and segregation from the mainstream was the surprising fact that it was not a public event. This striking dissimilarity to the open, public and communitarian form of the historical *șezătoare* is nevertheless a feature that I could not observe while attending the *șezători* from the province. The further away I got from the capital the more public and communitarian the nature of these events became, while at the same time also becoming increasingly theatrical and scripted.



Figure 45: Șezătoare in the city of Brașov on the 30.July.2016

On the 30th of July I attended the șezătoare in the city of Brașov and on the 15th of August one in the village of Ciocănești and even though one was organized in an urban setting and the other in a rural one they displayed more common features to each other than they shared with the one held in the capital.



Figure 46: Șezătoare in the village of Ciocănești, Neamț County, Bukovina on the 15th Aug. 2016

The main and important difference is their public character. While all șezători were originally like this, the core group in Bucharest soon restricted the attendance so that only registered members would be allowed to participate. The location of the șezătoare, even though held in a public space was not advertised anywhere and was difficult to find even if one happened to walk into the venue. On the other hand both the șezători depicted in the above images were held at public events on city council premises. However, it is important to stress that even though they were integrated into larger public festivities on the day I visited, the regional group organizers reassured me that their meetings are always held in public due to the fact that it allows them to interact with the general population and appeal to them via direct display of their activity but more importantly they are always public because they depend on the city or village council to grant them the right to use public facilities as their venue. Dressed in their most lavish traditional costumes the participants at both regional meetings were keen on performing the șezătoare. Therefore, the goal of the meeting was less for the private exchange of intimate stories between the participants as was the case in Bucharest but

it was more focused on reenacting an idealized version of the traditional custom, on putting on a show for the audience and in doing so establishing rapport both with local authorities and the populace as cultural mediators. If the upper echelon ladies from the capital explained that it is impossible for them to actually sew at the *șezătoare* because it is "far too distracting, too loud and too chaotic for them to be able to focus on the meticulous tasks" (field diary 27.07.2016) sewing took a center stage role during the regional meetings, techniques being demonstrated, motifs being interpreted and explained and the audience being repeatedly asked to join in. Unfortunately, the elaborate display was not sufficient in convincing the locals to participate and there are several reasons for it that I wish to discuss.

Faced with economic stagnation and lack of job prospects Bukovina and many other regions across the country are challenged by massive economic migration. The young seek work abroad or in the big cities which puts them in a constant state of flux, of coming back home and leaving again as soon as new prospects appear, this leaves little room for them to attend to practices that are considerably taxing on time and resources such as the traditional crafts. Considering that the demand for traditional clothes was booming it was perplexing to me to know that hardly any young people were considering dedicating their efforts towards traditional crafts as a main source for income, while their grandmothers would sew on demand for clients from across the world (cf. Lommer Eleonora). So if there was indeed demand for hand sewn traditional garments why were the locals still reluctant to commit to this enterprise, why was sewing considered not economically viable? The reasons for this are tied with the lack of communitarian spirit and a sense of unity that dominates the thinking and perception of the people living here and is being exploited by both elements from the regional state authority, by highly entrepreneurial yet unscrupulous locals and by the high organized foreign merchants. Historically speaking the *Ie* functioned more as a marker of distinction, particularity and ingroup allegiance rather than expressing a wider communitarian function that later academic interpretations assumed it did. Similarly, social life was segmented with each village functioning in more or less autonomy from the neighboring ones (cf Iuga 2016: 39).

In order to be able to be commercially active as a craftsman, to sell traditional hand crafted products, people require a permit issued by the regional bureau of the public cultural authority. Because these permits are hard to obtain and from what I was led to understand there is a degree of corruption involved in the process of their issuing many craftsmen are barred from selling their products at the markets which are predominantly occupied by traders

who go around the villages buy objects from the producers often at sub optimal prices and sell them at the large regional tourist markets, where due to the uniqueness of their models, they are highly sought after as rarities, for maximum profits (cf. Monica Balatchi, Nicoleta Irimescu). Due to these structural impediments many craftsmen can only work on demand when they are contacted by prospective clients directly, which diminishes the amount of economically viable work they end up doing considerably. Furthermore, the unrestricted access on the regional markets of cheap industrially produced shirts drives the prices down dramatically, which given the already pained economic situation of the region, makes it very difficult to expect proper financial remuneration for the invested time and effort (cf. Lina Jucan).

Even though they could celebrate some achievements in the region, such as establishing a cooperation with the main ethnographic museum of Bukovina which allowed them to organized specially tailored șezători for young girls, the efforts of the Semne Cusute community to revitalize the culture of the handmade traditional shirt are impeded by structural conditions.

Conclusively, this example demonstrates the importance of making an analytic distinction between culture as values and culture as strategies of action when doing ethnographic work because the outcomes can diverge drastically. In Bukovina, everyone recognizes and appreciates the higher value of the hand sewn traditional *ie* and agrees that it is unacceptable for foreigners to dominate the local markets with counterfeit products (cf. Lina Jucan) but nobody seems capable of finding adequate solutions for the structural problems that limit the access of regional craftsmen to the market, that regulate the pricing of the items sold and bought by traders nor is anyone willing to dispense with inherited distrust of their immediate neighbors because everyone suspects each other of being a trader who only wants to "come to our villages and take our *ie*" (Aurica Buburuzan).

7. Conclusions

The goal of this thesis was to describe the way in which a person or a group of persons can appropriate traditional textile craft products, specifically the *Ie*, and use them to shape culture.

Due to the overwhelming complexity of the conceptual load culture has been burdened with my first step was to deconstruct the term and break it down to its constituent parts whose individual function I could more easily trace. Adopting three distinct theoretical vantage points, namely those of cultural analysis, anthropological semiotics and systems theory I demonstrated how culture is a conceptual apparatus that operates by "packaging" complex meaning derived from shared human experience into elements (such as symbols or strategies of patterning behavior) that people can use across space and time to solve problems. However, because cultural operations happen in relation to a constantly changing environment which shifts clusters of meaning around a spatio-temporal field unpredictably, embedded within culture is a self-regulatory mechanism that continuously runs parity checks assessing its output based on three standardized guidelines. Cultural products, whatever their form or function may be when integrated into the daily projects of people, must effect behavior that is appropriate to the environment, must relate to lived experience and must engender communication otherwise the flow of information is halted and cultural atrophy begins settling in. When that happens the problem solving capacity of entire segments of society begins to falter and people start experiencing increased levels of psychosomatic stress which leads to the discontinuation of patterned behavior, the effect of which is the gradual loss of meaning as individual and collective human experience, the necessary semiotic raw material that culture requires to operate is either dissipated through unintelligible acts of communication into the void of an inchoate environment or is compartmentalized to such an extreme degree that never gets shared past the level of the individual or his immediate kin. It is exactly within such periods that individual or groups can begin to craft alternate modes of conceptualizing experience and shaping human actions by engaging in a persistent process of ideological activism by means of introducing into the fold of the network of meaning that is culture, new and situational permutations of existing symbolic forms, which are by design addressing conflicting situations with a unilateral context dependent and not mutually interchangeable behavioral response.

In the analysis of the data from my case study of the revitalization movement *Semne Cusute* I have demonstrated how by manipulating the meanings attached to material artifacts,

specifically traditional clothing, via selective contextual switching, they are transformed into symbols and are used to on the one hand elicit and control desired strategies of action and on the other as a public medium for the articulation of identity, social and political commentary and personal experience.

Because "[...] artifacts embody and exhibit 'personal and collective identities, aesthetic and instrumental purposes, mundane and spiritual aspirations' one must consider the different contexts in which objects are used and are given meaning." (Iuga 2016: 37)

One of my main arguments being that meaning, once processed by cultural operations is never forgotten even if it loses relevance and no longer directly shapes behavior and strategies of action, it remains archived within the symbolic forms it was associated with, I sought to demonstrate via the cultural projects of Semne Cusute how, given careful semiotic management symbolically encoded meaning can be used to cultivate communities, produce identities, signal cohesion or distinction and facilitate the formulation of new patterns of behavior in vastly different contexts than its source.

"Symbols and representations are important in the production of identities. This is how we signal our identities to others and how we know which people we identify with and those who are distinguished as being different." (Woodward 2000: 12)

By running an in depth analysis of the historical, social, political and economic contexts in which the Semne Cusute movement operates and cross referencing them with the intricate web of practices its members engage in that I encountered in my field research I was able to close the analytic gap between what the movement proposes to revitalize, the distinct type of traditional dress as it existed in the late nineteenth century and the myriad connotations, motivations and patterns of behavior that are actually subjected to deliberate change.

My research demonstrates that Ms.Corduneanu in her capacity as the leader of the revitalization movement is a very efficient semiotician as she effectively cycles through a wide spectrum of possible meanings associated with the broader domain of traditional textile crafts as well as with the specific symbolic dimensions of the Bukovinean shirts, which she emphasizes or subverts according to the desired context of usage. In doing so historical characteristics of the *Ie* and its origins are used to provide solutions to contemporary problems or vice versa, interpretations of historical symbolism and contexts are heavily nuanced by contemporary values, notions and biases.

"While clothing is often 'taken for granted', it is an essential part of communication: it helps define a situation by emphasizing certain principles while serving to conceal or maintain ambiguity about others. While clothing and adornment vary in what, when and how they symbolically relate to behavior, they are always, even in their absence, part of the process and structure of action." (Schwarz 1979: 40)

By recognizing this semiotic malleability of clothing and its dialectic propensities that create a lasting link between the present and many, different pasts, changing and shifting depending on the point of reference, Ms.Corduneanu consistently attributes new symbolic associations and contextual dimensions to the *Ie*, ever so slightly changing what it represents.

The *Ie* was thus turned into a universal panacea into which people can easily project their insecurities. Therefore, those worried about the negative effects of unsustainable consumerism typical of capitalist society can help solve the problem by recognizing the superior quality of sewing their own clothing; those trying to rediscover their ancestral roots after decades of communist dislocation and disenfranchisement can do so by sewing a model that Ms.Corduneanu assures them is the same to what their ancestors living in a remote region of the country would have been wearing centuries ago. For those traumatized by the horrific loss of life in a national tragedy, the *Ia* is a means to become charitable and yet for many more it symbolizes a keen eye for fashion and being conscious of trends in dress and self-expression.

"Clothes may be a way of acquiring the confidence that comes with 'good' timing within the fashion cycle. The anticipation is that new clothing places one more surely within the range of the most admired appearances of the moment and, therefore, in a position of social approval." (Bubolz Eicher and Roach 1979: 9)

Such numerous and oftentimes convoluted semantic shifts can only be effectively managed if they orbit around a fixed position, in the case of the Semne Cusute movement, the static element is the materiality and typology of the *Ie*, which is fervently and dogmatically enforced. Only the models displayed on the Semne Cusute blog are considered authentic and capable of absorbing and representing all the above symbolic meanings.

Such dogmatism is naturally going to encounter resistance and criticism for its myopic representation of the diversity of textile craft making, yet the success of the movement rests not on its full ethnographic accuracy but on the systemic and structural inefficiencies within the state institutions that should be documenting, researching and publishing about the textile

heritage but are not. Therefore, Ms.Corduneanu has indirectly taken over this important cultural function at a crucial moment in time, when

" [Romanians] have passed the stage when we were all fascinated with the West, when we all wanted to get there as fast as possible because we desired a lot of things we didn't have for a long stretch of time; but now we started gazing back at ourselves. We went there, saw what it is like, discovered the 'Other' and now we feel it is time to discover ourselves." (Irina Apan)

and supplanted the history of the Romanian textile heritage with her simplified and exclusivist view, which enables the formulation of the distinct strategies of action she wishes to become part of the routines of Romanian society.

What is being revitalized therefore is not so much the interest for textile crafts, because that was the prerequisite for the success of the entire project, not so much the large scale production of traditional shirts or costumes per se, because as I have explained throughout Chapter 6 only a tiny fraction of the membership has the resources and the capabilities to adhere to the exceedingly strict guidelines of Ms.Corduneanu but the sense of belonging to a likeminded community and the social structures that would foster the development and maintenance of such a large network of people bound together by their belief in the capacity of the *Ie* to be not only a representation of cultural change, but also the driver of it. What Semne Cusute revitalized is the capacity of people in a post-socialist society characterized by distrust, lack of faith in public institutions, economic deprivation and a feeling of powerlessness in relation to the forces of globalization, marketization and global cultural hegemonies to build structures of material, emotional and potentially spiritual support, to organize social activism, to express their grievances and challenge dominant discourses in consumer society, to build an informal yet effective social network that provides them with possibly the most valuable commodity in times of crises, namely trust.

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8.3 Interviews

Ioana Corduneanu, interview on the 29th July 2016, 15:00, Bucharest, 90:49 min.

Irina Apan, interview on the 31st July 2016, / , Braşov, 43:27 min.

Sonia Vert, informal discussion on the 3rd August 2016, 19:00, Piatra Neamţ, /

Group interview: Monica Balatchi and Nicoleta Irimescu on the 13th August 2016, 16:30, Vatra Dornei, 66 min.

Lina Jucan, interview on the 15th August 2016, 17:00, Humor Monastery, 73 min.

Eleonora Lommer, interview on the 16th August 2016, 14:15, Humor Village, 35 min.

Aurica Buburuzan, interview on the 16th August 2016, 16:25, Humor Monastery, 25 min.

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<http://artapringauracheii.ro/hashtag-givecredit-controversa-tory-burch-interviu-andreea-diana-tanasescu-arta-prin-gaura-cheii-steluta-rosca-stanescu/> (Accessed 19.10.2017)

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Figure 29: Collection of sketches and graphics representing traditional Ie designs from Bukovina in Erich Kolbenhayer's monograph "Motive der Hausindustriellen Stickerei in der

Bukovina" photograph from the archive of Ms. Ioana Corduneanu dated 22.01.2009. used with permission.

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9. Appendix

Abstract English

This paper will focus on analyzing how cultural revitalization movements function. By adopting three distinct theoretical vantage points, namely those of cultural analysis, anthropological semiotics and systems theory the semantically overburdened term 'culture' will be deconstructed. Culture is presented as a network of meanings from which people, based on the structural opportunities available to them in the context of their lives appropriate symbolic devices in order to construct "strategies of action". The capacity of these strategies to shape appropriate behavior in relation to the threats of a constantly shifting environment determines social stability. During unsettled periods individuals experience increased levels of psychosomatic stress which leads to the discontinuation of patterned behavior and can lead to complete societal implosion. It is during such periods that people are more willing to transfer the responsibility for their actions to agents who offer them the chance to participate in uniform processes of symbolic communication and strictly patterned behavior as long as it reinforces their perceived personal or collective identity. Recent years saw a cultural boom in Romania centered around the rediscovery of traditional textile crafts. Urban women across the nation mobilized in a unified movement to express their creativity but also their common identity by learning to create the Ia, the historic Romanian rural clothing, according to what they believe are the authentic historic rules. Promoting the appreciation for handmade crafts and a do-it-yourself lifestyle that the traditional Ia represents, they seek to solve the problems post-socialist Romanian society is facing and thus successfully engage in the process of cultural revitalization.

Abstract Deutsch

In dieser Arbeit wird untersucht, wie kulturelle Revitalisierungsbewegungen funktionieren. Durch die Übernahme dreier, unterschiedlicher theoretischer Perspektiven, nämlich Kulturanalyse, Anthropologische Semiotik und Systemtheorie, wird der semantisch überlastete Begriff "Kultur" dekonstruiert. Kultur wird als Bedeutungsnetzwerk, aus dem Menschen auf der Grundlage der Ihnen im Rahmen Ihres Lebens zur Verfügung stehenden strukturellen Möglichkeiten symbolische Vorrichtungen aneignen, um damit "Handlungsstrategien" zu konstruieren, präsentiert. Die Fähigkeit dieser Strategien, angemessenes Verhalten in Bezug auf die Bedrohungen einer sich ständig wandelnden Umwelt zu gestalten, bestimmt die soziale Stabilität. In unruhigen Zeiten erleben Individuen erhöhten psychosomatischen Stress, der zum Abbruch des gemusterten Verhaltens führt und zum vollständigen gesellschaftlichen Zusammenbruch führen kann. In solchen Zeiten sind die Menschen eher bereit, die Verantwortung für Ihr Handeln auf Agenten zu übertragen, die Ihnen die Möglichkeit bieten, an einheitlichen Prozessen der symbolischen Kommunikation und streng gemusterten Verhaltens teilzunehmen, solange diese Ihre wahrgenommene persönliche oder kollektive Identität stärken. In den letzten Jahren gab es in Rumänien ein kulturelles Boom, bei dem es um die Wiederentdeckung des traditionellen Textilhandwerks ging. Frauen aus dem urbanen Milieu im ganzen Lande haben sich zu einer einheitlichen Bewegung zusammengeschlossen, um Ihrer Kreativität, als auch Ihrer gemeinsamen Identität, durch das Erlernen der Techniken, die Ihnen das Schaffen der Ia, die historische Rumänischen ländlichen Kleidung, Ausdruck zu geben. Ihr handwerkliches Treiben führen Sie weiter entsprechend, Ihres Beachtens, strikten authentischen historischen Regeln. Anhand der öffentlichen Förderung der Wertschätzung für Kunsthandwerk und eines do-it-yourself-Lebensstils, was Sie in der traditionellen Ia widerspiegelt finden, versuchen Sie die Probleme welche die post-sozialistische rumänische Gesellschaft plagten zu lösen um sich damit erfolgreich in einem Prozess der kulturellen Revitalisierung zu engagieren.