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Author: Anca Giurchescu

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## Căluș: between ritual and national symbol\* The cultural market of traditions

Anca Giurchescu

For the topic „Making and consuming tradition“ I chose to present a case study: the *căluș* of the commune Optași-Măgura (district Olt)<sup>1</sup> which I followed in 1968, 1976 and again in 1992-93-94, in 1998 and 2001, and finally in 2006. I will also comment in few words on the *căluș* of Izvoarele (district Olt), which I recorded in 2007. Both examples are relevant to the survival mechanism of the ritual and in terms of its manipulation as a cultural commodity.

What is *căluș*? There are many and divergent theories regarding the origins of this complex ritual, most of them stemming from studies of „cultural archeology“ and comparative mythology. I will only mention the most important directions without further comment, because the focus of this article is not to disclose a distant past, but to analyse the current state of *căluș* and attempt to predict its future development.

Some theories seek to find the roots of *căluș* in the highly cultivated Latin and Greek mythologies which also have some Near-Eastern implications. Their counterpart is Slavic in origin with reference to the mythological beings Rusalii/ Rusalki.

The temptation to locate *căluș* in an autochthonous tradition traces it back to the religious practices of the Thacians-Dacians. Inquiry in the Romanian ritual system supports the theory that *căluș* was an integral part of ritual practices (during spring) stemming from the cult of an autochthon horse-god (*căluș*)<sup>2</sup>. Though these theories are all hypothetical, each of them may illuminate at least one of the many features that make up the complex structure of *căluș*. They may also prove that the „Romanian *căluș*“ is far from being as authentic and unique as we would like to believe. Many ritual complexes of *căluș* can be found in the old cultural strata of Southern Europe and England.<sup>3</sup>

In its current existence, *căluș* establishes a ritual communication between the real world represented by a given community and the mythical world represented by female demons (*iele*).<sup>4</sup> The mediators are a clearly structured group of men supposedly endowed with supernatural power to protect the community against the *iele*'s malefic deeds, cure sick persons, and bring fertility<sup>5</sup>. They carry out seasonal ritual at the Orthodox Pentecost, marking the passage from spring to summer, from this world to the 'world beyond', and from the living to the dead ancestors.

Since different levels of culture change at different speeds [Winner 1976:115], comparative studies showed that diachrony within synchrony is one of the main traits of any ritual system. Thus, according to the social-cultural development of the communities considered on a synchronic level, *căluș* may show different diachronic stages from traditional, ritual events to events where emphasis is put on the artistic (aesthetic) make-up of *căluș*<sup>6</sup>.

Conceived as a complex and meaningful culture text (a „semiotic object“ according to A.J. Greimas, 1971), *căluș* is made up of several expressive means which are interrelated and which, according to subjective or objective circumstances, change their hierarchy of importance. It is comprised of: **ritual objects** (i.e. flag, magical plants, bells, wooden phallus and sword) + **actions** (i.e. leaping over a person, passing under the sword, falling in trance, breaking a pot) + **texts** (verbal utterances, text of the oath) + **ritual rules** and **interdictions** (not to touch or

be touched by women, not to separate from the group, not to divulge the ‘secret’ of *căluș*); of **dance + music + costume + ornaments/masks** and of **dramatic sketches**. These means interlock in different constellations and at different levels of meaning (ritual, artistic, or entertainment), giving *căluș* its polysemic character. Thus, one and the same *căluș* event may be interpreted by both performers and spectators as **sacred ritual**, **ceremonial respect** for tradition, **identity** symbol, **art** performance, **entertainment**, or simply as a means of **economic gain**.

Due to the complexity of human identities, a feature which serves to connect tradition with modernity, there are many examples when „magical thinking“ and pragmatic world-view may exist side by side. To the question: „Do *iele* (fairies) still exist?“ The answer was: „They stopped flying over the woods because they may hurt the electric, high tension wires“.



According to a local legend of Optași: „*When God built the church, the devil challenged him by creating the căluș in order to see which of them would attract more people.... The devil largely won, because the whole village followed the călușari* „ [Giblea, 1993]. Indeed, the **spectacle dimension** inherent to *căluș* functions to make the ritual more powerful and convincing. The most important expressive instruments for carrying out the ritual functions are dance, music and theatrical actions.

Why is dance so important in *căluș*? Dance movements create an ecstatic state that symbolically raises the dancer from reality to an ‘other level’, where communication with the spirits becomes possible. The structured movements of *căluș* carry symbolic connotations. **Virtuosity** – for example – is supposed to symbolize supernatural power: „*The dance is intricate and difficult because it comes either from iele or from the devil*“ [Zamfir, 1976]. The **circular path** describes a sacred space, where the prophylactic and fertility promoting power of the Călușari becomes effective. **Leaping** over a dancer, over a child or a sick person is meant to protect, to convey strength, or to heal<sup>7</sup>.

### **Căluș in the official perspective**

In Optași, as elsewhere during the **revolutionary** stage of communism (1948-1965) when religious practices and mystical beliefs were interdicted, the ritual components of *căluș* continued to survive in a latent and hidden phase. Conversely, the artistic components (dance, music, costume) adapted for the stage, became important ingredients in festivals, and state ceremonies with hundreds of *călușari* from different villages dancing together in a stadium! The expressive elements segregated from their original context were employed primarily as a „wrapping“ for political messages. Their purpose was to symbolize the radical changes occurring at all levels of the material and spiritual life of

the people, and their unity around the Communist Party. [Giurchescu 1990:52]

During the **nationalistic** stage under Ceaușescu’s dictatorship (1965-1989), *căluș* became a symbol for Romanian’s cultural antiquity, historical continuity, unity and high artistic qualities. Placed in this perspective both the ritual and the artistic (aesthetic) dimensions of *căluș* were manipulated as elements of spectacle. *Căluș*, like any other form of ‘living’ tradition articulates beliefs, life experiences, group ideology, political attitudes and informal answers to the rulers’ exercise of power. All of these can never be completely controlled. Hence, the tendency of State cultural authorities is to replace traditional social contexts with spectacular manifestations (festivals, competitions, etc.), and to pack ritual events with spectacular elements.

In order to illustrate a new symbolic function *căluș* was deconstructed and only the most „representative“, „beautiful“, „authentic“ and „clean“ elements were selected to reconstitute it as a new artistic product. The many forms of the staged *căluș* (both as ritual and dance performances) were therefore manipulated in the political discourse to symbolize national identity, ethnic continuity, ancient cultural heritage, and unity in diversity [Giurchescu 1987:169]; and the national system of competitive manifestations „*Cântarea României*“ (Song to Romania), provided an exemplary arena for symbolic political manipulation in the cultural domain.

Since 1966 the *căluș* of Optași was codified as a system of spectacles isolated within the various forms. It was adapted for stage by a non local ‘specialist’ who choreographed a „traditional“ dance suite. The basic movement patterns called ‘walking’ (*plimbare*) and ‘movement’ (*mișcare*) were selected according to virtuosity criteria, re-ordered in a stable succession and structurally modified<sup>8</sup>. This set choreography was perpetuated on stage over years and finally „*got into our blood*“ [Turianu, 1994].

The main event for staged performances is the „**Romanian Căluș Festival**“ of Caracal

(created in 1969), a competition claiming to be a contribution to the **preservation** and **promotion** of the *căluș* tradition. In the Socialist Era and until 1992 however, the festival was deliberately organized at Pentecost in order to hinder the practice of *căluș* in the villages at its ritually prescribed time. For the cultural activists it was much more important to enforce the new „tradition“ of the **Căluș Festival** then to keep alive the traditional *căluș* in its natural settings.

To solve the dilemma that arises from the dichotomy of traditional vs. staged *căluș* two groups were organized in Optași-Măgura: one team prepared to participate at the Festival and another to perform in the village the ‘real’ *căluș*.<sup>9</sup> After 1993 the local organizers delayed the *Căluș* Festival by one week after Pentecost, thus creating the opportunity for local teams to make an unfettered choice of competing on stage. There were also made modest attempts to give the Festival a scientific dimension by attaching a symposium to it, as well as inviting groups of Men’s Dances with instruments from abroad. Both initiatives remained however at an „amateur“ level.

Concluding remark: The dimension of spectacle is imbedded in the very structure of *Căluș*. During 50 years of Communist rule the staged performances of *căluș* were used as channels for the transmission of political messages. However, during all these years the ritual *căluș* followed a parallel life through being practiced with a certain continuity in its natural settings.



### **Căluș in transformation**

Returning in 1992 to Optași, after 11 years of absence, I could observe many changes which occurred in this period of time. Only a few will be mentioned here:

– If in 1969 the belief in the power of *iele* and the link with witchcraft was strong, in 1993 its significance was almost lost. If healing was carried out in 1965 and 1969, presently it is only mentioned as a potential function. If chastity and other ritual interdictions were still observed in the 70s, all the ritual rules are presently more permissive.

– In the 70s magical actions such as the „raising the flag“, „taking the oath“ and „burying of the flag“ (for binding the group, endowing the participants with supernatural power protecting them against the malefic deeds of the *iele*, and finally for disbanding the group) were all esoteric. Presently in a more simplified form they have become public manifestations. For example, the sacred oath on the flag is verbalized and its text is adapted to nowadays realities.<sup>10</sup>

– The duration of the *căluș* ritual has been reduced from 5 to a maximum of three days.

– The costume, with ritually significant elements (belts crossed over the chest, babies caps, embroidered handkerchiefs, bells, and the Turkish *fes*<sup>11</sup>, has been embellished to suit the stage demands.

– The most important character „the mute“ (*mutul*), originally **the ritual leader** of the group, became a comical character, still carrying a mask, sword and a women’s skirt. The wooden phallus (fecundity symbol) being considered



‘obscene’ has been removed. In the comical skits, which have death and resurrection as central theme, the text became more important than the traditional pantomime.

– If in 1969 the repertoire was comprised of around 16 movements (*mișcări*) and around 7 walking-steps (*plimbări*), in 1992 the average was 8 and 7 and in 1998 only 4 *mișcări* and 5 *plimbări* were performed in the courtyards. The loss of dance material was compensated by increase of tempo and dynamics.

– Traditionally the chronology of sequences was indicated by the leader (*vătaf*) with codified signals because pronouncing their names was ritually interdicted. Presently this interdiction is interpreted as a method of protecting them from being ‘stolen’ by other competing groups.

Concluding remark: *Căluș* is one of the ritual events which has resisted decline over a period of time. Its vitality and viability reside in the

capacity of the event to incorporate new, even antithetical elements. It is the malleability of its structure that favors the processes of transformation and self-regulation assuring the stability of *căluș* in time.

#### ***Căluș* between the courtyard and the stage**

The *călușari* of Optași-Măgura are aware of the differences between ‘acting’ in the village and ‘dancing’ on stage. „*The real căluș is that with flag, in the village, on stage is not tradition*“ states Florea Giblea, the old *vătaf*, and continues: „*When we dance on stage we are tired after few minutes, when we take an oath on the flag in the village we dance three days without getting tired*“ [Giblea, 1993].

Their experience in both contexts is characterized in the following terms: Performing in the village implies **the oath** on the ritual flag, the

**presence of the audience** in the courtyards „*who look with pleasure at us*“ [Scarlat, 1998], the **comical sketches** played by the mute, **free choice** of the dance repertoire by the *vătaf*, and finally the „**burial**“ of the flag.

In theatrical contexts the ritual space is substituted by the **stage** where the *călușari* ‘**present**’ the dance as an ‘**artifact**’. The stage performance is characterized by the *călușari* of Optași as being: short, intense, fast and exhausting, ruled by homogeneity and uniformity.

In 1976, at the „Romanian *Căluș* Festival“ of Caracal organized on Whitsunday (intentionally to enhance de-ritualisation) I followed traditional groups of *călușari* (among them the group of Optași) enacting the ritual *căluș* through the streets of the town Slatina (district Olt) before and after having performed on stage. The ritual implements such as flag, mask, sword and wooden phallus were left at the stage entrance [Giurchescu, 1990:53]. The trait that unifies both village and stage performances is the pride of being *călușar*, the belief in the power of the dance, and the strong spirit of competition. For example, when competing on stage, the dancers may become angry, even violent, if they do not get the expected recognition<sup>12</sup>. „*If you have a heart and a faith, you **must** dance. It is similar to football, to rugby, to any kind of competing plays*“ [Vancea, 1993].

Concluding remarks: *Căluș* in the courtyard and on stage are carried out successively by the same performers due to their psychological ambivalence and to their capacity of connecting, without merging, these two conflicting hypotheses of *căluș*.

### Fieldwork in Optași- Măgura 1993<sup>13</sup>

The village of Optași- Măgura and the local *căluș* were subject to two experiments: one that brought „the large world“ (members of the ICTM Sub-Study Group on Fieldwork Theory and Methods) to the village in June 1993, and the second in June-July 1999, that brought the

group of *călușari* to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC.

In 1993 at our first meeting with the local ‘manager’ of the *căluș* team, Florea Turuianu, a conflicting situation emerged due to the discrepancy between our expectation for a ‘real’ and ‘genuine’ event, and that of our hosts who wanted to present something ‘**beautiful**’ and ‘**authentic**’, in order to create an idyll image of their local tradition.

Three *căluș* groups from three villages of the commune Optași-Măgura merged to make up a team with 15-17 dancers and three leaders (*vătafi*): the ‘ritual’ *vătaf* Florea Giblea (born 1930), the ‘artistic’ leader, and manager of the groups, Florea Turuianu (born 1954) and the former leader of the teenage group Marius Scarlat (born 1972). This unusual situation created a tense relationship between the two older leaders. For the ‘raising of the flag’ Turuianu proposed a ‘**traditional**’ place, in a beautiful landscape outside the village. The truth is that over the last five years the flag was raised in the courtyard of the *vătaf*. The same care for a positive image obliged the two mutes (*muți*) to polish verbal utterances and control gestures that imitated the sexual act when performing comical skits. Very soon however, our presence stopped being a disturbing factor and one of the mutes concluded: „*We do our job, the way we always did*“.

In November 1994 I returned to record the local people’s comments on our experiment. The presence of the foreigners gave the community (and the host families) prestige status. The videotapes they received from us were showed in the club, in private homes, at weddings and even borrowed to the neighboring villages. The *căluș* of Optași-Măgura got official recognition by being stamped as ‘**representative**’ cultural asset. Everybody agreed that the presence in the commune of foreign researchers had positive results: it enhanced the festive character of the event, brought a large audience and helped keeping the tradition alive. However, such questions as: „*When will our *Căluș* be shown on TV?*“ or



„how much are you paid for this work?“ or complaints such as: „They took our treasure and didn't pay enough for it!“ proved that for the local people *căluș* is, in addition to its other properties, also a cultural commodity with material value.

Concluding remark: Opening few selected villages for small groups of specialists/cultural tourists interested in observing the *căluș* event in its social setting, is a method of raising it to a global dimension without imposing ‘dramatic’ changes. For the local people controlled tourism means acknowledgement of the symbolic and aesthetic values of *căluș*. It could also be a source for economic gain. The risk of *căluș* being changed by the local community (or officials) according to some ideal formula could be avoided through systematic information and explanation.

### The Smithsonian Folklife Festival

In 1998, the *căluș* team of Optași-Măgura was proposed as participants at the **Smithsonian Folklife Festival**, in 1999<sup>14</sup>. Since I did not belong to the staff responsible for selection I had the privileged position of independent observer and confidant of the group.

The team learned that they had to perform ‘as in the village’, to be perceived as ‘real’ and ‘credible’, in order to create the illusion of reality in a non familiar surrounding. Forced to limit the number of participants to only 8 *călușari* and two musicians, the criteria for selection were: „*strength, endurance, commitment to dance, mutual friendship relations and obedience to the leader*” [Turuianu, 2001].

The participants promised to wear hand-made costumes, giving up the standardized stage

ones, and to provide an „ugly mask after the old model“ and a red wooden sword for the ‘mute’.

However the political dimension of such a prestigious cultural project imposed its own demands which contradicted the theoretical foundation of the Folklife project. Thus surprisingly, the ‘mute’, which always had a tremendous success in the village, was left home. The official explanation was that the ‘mute’ did not receive an entrance visa to the States. According to the team members[i][16], the ‘grotesque’ behavior of the mute, his sexual imitative gestures, rough dialogue, and ugly appearance, might have carried the negative message of ‘primitivism’ for a foreign audience. This **self-censorship**, which certainly pleased the officials, is in fact a stereotype inherited from the communist period, which tried to hide reality or to present it under an idealized form<sup>15</sup>.

The *căluș* performed at the Folklife Festival was for the interpreters neither a ritual, a staged performance or a reconstruction. It was a combination of all these situations making it a unique experience. I quote: „*We danced on stage, but also on the plain with a cheering crowd around us that enhanced our pleasure and commitment to dance*“; „*People of the audience danced with us the final hora*“. „*On the Mall, similar to the village situation the vătaf had the freedom to choose the set of dances he wanted*“ [Scarlat, 2001].

The feeling of a real, spontaneous performance was enhanced by the presence of Romanian-Americans who acted as insiders of the event. They asked the *călușari* to dedicate the dances for the well-being of a person. I quote the *vătaf* Marius Scarlat: „*everybody gave us children to ‘be danced’ for protection, health and luck*“<sup>16</sup>. *The audience paid by throwing money on the floor or into our hats*“. Situated on the midway between play and ritual, *căluș* was experienced in an ambivalent way. On June 23<sup>rd</sup> the *călușari* raised the flag on the Mall, marking the beginning of the Festival: „*It was only a demon-*

*stration and the oath we took was not completed, because the real oath has been taken in the village, at Rusalii*“. However, only by enacting the ritual gestures and taking formally the oath the *călușari* felt endowed with „*responsibility, courage, and excitement*“ [Scarlat and Pirciu, 2001].

The ambivalent attitude emerged at the point where the *călușari* performing the ritual with great conviction, as excellent actors, were persuaded that the traditional *căluș* has been „*only little changed*“ in Washington. However, in order to enhance entertainment the *călușari* finished their performance with a wedding *hora* involving kissing (*perinița* – little pillow) and presented as „*our oldest ritual round dance*“. Marius Scarlat the young leader changed the two home-woven bands across his chest, with bands in the colors of the Romanian flag: „*It was my idea. People in America should know where we are coming from. It was a kind of symbol*“ [Scarlat, 2001].

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival was a convincing demonstration of the way traditional heritage is both preserved and modified in new socio-cultural frameworks.

At home each participant at the Festival enjoyed high prestige status mixed, however, with envy for their supposed economic gain. This unique experience increased the participants’ self-esteem expressed in terms such as: ‘great artists’, ‘maestro’, ‘prestigious creators’, or ‘famous rhapsod’ (referring to the violin player and singer Radu Titirică who accompanied them). Some *călușari*, members of the ultra nationalist party Romania Mare constructed a new discourse on *căluș* that aimed for „*the preservation of this beautiful, non polluted tradition that we inherited from our Roman ancestors*“.

The intention of the *căluș* group which experienced the „Folklife Festival“ was to set up a foundation and an artistic ensemble in order to travel abroad. Its goal was both artistic and economical gain.

In 2006, when I returned to Optași, the *căluș* group was dispersed and did not raise the flag in the village. It became a performance group appropriate for national and international display.

The next year, 2007, **precisely at Pentecost** the *căluș* of Optași was invited to perform in the European Capital of Culture, Sibiu, thereby hindering the enactment of the event in the village at its prescribed time.

Concluding remarks: By being removed from its traditional setting and exported to other social contexts the *căluș* event becomes in essence an artifact, a cultural commodity. However, if the framework of spectacle offers a performance environment where the *călușari* feel comfortable and free to reenact the practice by maintaining its original atmosphere (as in Folklife Festival) this form of performance could substitute for dancing on stage. A side effect is the psychological impact on the *călușari* who start to consider

themselves „professional artists“ and the dances of *căluș* their domain of expertise.

### ***Căluș* as Intangible Cultural Treasure of the Humanity.**

In 2005 the Romanian *căluș* received the prestigious UNESCO title of Intangible Cultural Treasure of Humanity. I was tempted to see to what extent this newly acquired status has had an impact on the carriers of the tradition and on the communities as a whole. Surprisingly none of the *căluș* groups I met in the field had the smallest idea about the prestigious status of the ritual they were practicing.

Some questions are emerging from this new situation:

– should these groups (including Optași) be aware about the worldwide cultural prestige of *căluș* and about the fact that, according to



UNESCO's statement, they should protect, preserve and disseminate this ritual event?

– Should the dance of *căluș* continue to be displayed on stage, for festivals and art competitions, or should other forms of presentation/dissemination be experimented with?

– And finally, will *căluș* still continue to exist in traditional settings and under what kind of circumstances?

The fieldwork which I carried out at Pentecost 2007 will answer perhaps this last question<sup>17</sup>.

In the village Izvoarele (district Olt) we followed a team of very young *călușari*, with some distrust at the beginning<sup>18</sup>. The ritual raising of the flag was performed with full observance of the local rules and interdictions (no onlookers – we got special permission to film – and the respect of total silence). At a certain moment we were signalled to approach the flag in order to be ritually 'bound' into the group. To my question, why? The young *vătaf* answered: „*It would have been dangerous for both you and us. We could lose our power and you could get sick*“. There were many other situations when these very young *călușari* seemed to enact ritual practices with dedication and full conviction. I asked myself, why? Was it belief, diffuse fear, respect for inherited tradition, or what else?

The dancing was not very good and the repertoire rather limited. What was then their reason

for performing *căluș* for a whole day in two villages, and the next day in the town Slatina? It is generally accepted that motivations are always circumstantial and changeable. This time material gain was in foreground. For each performance in a courtyard, every baby who was „jumped over“ and each branch of wormwood sold, the group was rather well paid. And people, especially women, crowded around the huge sack with wormwood and garlic carried by the 'mute' in the village as well as in town<sup>19</sup>.

Discussing the event with the performers, it became clear for me that an equivocal relationship

exists between the ritual content of *căluș*, and material gain. Thorough observance of ritual interdictions, convincing enactment of magical gestures and strong (dynamic) dancing may impress the public and call for high payment.

Concluding remarks:  
*Căluș* has several

levels of significance and exists in multiple forms, each being justified by one of the many cultural, socio-political and economical circumstances that exist in a community. Perhaps its tradition will be carried on over a long time, not primarily for its ritual content, but rather for the role of *căluș* as a local/national symbol, for the prestige status it confers on a community by raising it to a global dimension, for its entertainment qualities, and for economic gain.



## Notes:

\* This article expands some of the ideas presented at the 21<sup>st</sup> Symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, Korcula, 2000, and published in the Proceedings of the Symposium, pp. 62-69. Elsie Ivancich Dunin and Tvrtko Zebec editors, Zagreb, Croatia, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> The commune Optași-Măgura with ca. 5,000 inhabitants is comprised of the following villages: Vitănești, Sârbi, Coșereni, Ungheni, Branișteea, Zăvoi, Jugaru.

<sup>2</sup> Birlea, A. *Eseu despre dansul popular românesc*. București: Cartea Românească, 1982; Bucșan, A. «Contribuții la studiul jocurilor Călușărești». *Revista de etnografie și folclor*, 21 (1): 3, 1976 ; Eliade, M. «Notes on the Călușari», *Journal of the Ancient Near-Eastern Society*, 5: 115-122. 1973, and *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han*. București: Humanits, 1995 (Paris:Payot, 1970); Ghenea, C. «Contribuții la studiul dansului Călușarilor». *Istoria medicinei*, 232-241, 1957; Ghinoiu, I. *Obiceiuri populare de peste an*. *Dicționar*. pp.39-40. București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1997; Kligman, G. *Căluș. Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981; Papahagi, P. «Călușerii sau aruguciarii». *Graiul Bun*, I (4-5): 83-88, 1900; Pamfile, T. *Sărbătorile de vară la români*, București, 1900; Pop, M. «Călușul (Lectura unui text)». *Folclor Românesc* II: 267-279, București: Grai și Suflet, 1998; Speranția, T. *Miorița și călușarii, urme de la Daci*. București, 1914; Vuia, R. «Originea jocului de Călușari». *Studii de etnografie și folclor*, pp. 110-140, București: 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Some of these ritual elements or complexes are: enactment of 'death and resurrection', the 'mute' character wearing mask, organization of the ritual group, elements of costume, colors (red, white), ornaments, ritual implements (sticks, sword, phallus, bells), use of prophylactic plants, patterns of structured movements (jumping over, turning), healing with dance and magical manipulation, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Iele* (Eng. they), designates a group of fairies stemming from Diana's cult [Eliade, 1973 and 1995] and of that of Bendis, her Geto-Dacian hypostasis [Daicovicu, 1968:197-198]. These fairies of wild nature are known in the European culture as: Vila (southern Slavs), Rusalii (north-western Slavs), Vodka Pane and Diva Zen

(Bohemia), Bogunki (Poland), Elben, Elfen (Anglo-Saxons), Wilde Frauen, Nacht Frauen, Holden or Perthen (Germans), Bonne Donne (Italy), as well as the individual character Irodeasa (Romania), Herodia (Central Europe), Frau Holle (Germany), Samovila (Bulgaria)

<sup>5</sup> The group is comprised of an odd number of *călușari* (7-9-11), with no restriction for age and marital status. They observe a well established hierarchy under the leadership of a *vătaf*.

<sup>6</sup> For example, in the Homole mountains of north-eastern Serbia, *căluș* (locally named *crai*) is a ritual performed by the Vlach (Romanian speaking minority) exclusively in connection with the cult of the dead, in the Plain of Oltenia it functions to heal by trance, in south-west Muntenia the emphasis is on *căluș* artistic components (dance and music), while in south-east Muntenia theatrical performances move to the foreground.

<sup>7</sup> In southern Oltenia healing is connected with trance. It is believed that 'being knocked down' is the manifestation of the *iele*'s power. Coming under their spell the dancer takes on him the illness of the sick person and therefore falling into a trance is associated with fear. In 1976 however, during field research I realized that the magical act of 'knocking down' became a well paid spectacular performance.

<sup>8</sup> Some names of 'walking' in a circle: *plimbarea în-tâia*, *plimbarea dublă*, *călcata*, and sequences of virtuoso 'movement' on the spot: *vârtelnița*, *toarna*, *Gheorghîța*, *pădurea*. In traditional settings their succession and number varies from one courtyard to another.

<sup>9</sup> Due to Florea Turuianu, local teacher and excellent dancer, *căluș* is taught in school to talented children who perform on stage, and who potentially may become carrier of the tradition in the village as well.

<sup>10</sup> Translation of the oath taken on the flag in 1993. The 'old' *vătaf* Florea Giblea says the following text, each line being repeated by the group of *călușari*: „Repeat after me! / We swear/ We will dance with faith (loyalty)/We will not give the *căluș* dance/ To any other *căluș* group/ We will collect money by dancing *căluș*/ We will part it equally, foremost with the musicians“.

<sup>11</sup> Until the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in southern Romania the wedding costume for the bride included a red

*fes* covered by a veil (*maramă*). It may be assumed that the *călușari* were dressed with parts of the women peasant costume.

<sup>12</sup> The confrontation between two *căluș* groups that meet in a village was a widely spread practice, attested in Optași-Măgura as well.

<sup>13</sup> At the fieldwork experiment organized at the Orthodox Pentecost (3-9 June) for the members of the Sub-Study Group on Fieldwork Theory and Methods the participants were divided in three groups, each documenting the *căluș* ritual in a different village. The team of Optași-Măgura was comprised of: Helene Eriksen (Germany), Allegra Fuller Snyder (USA), Fügei Ianos (Hungary), Anca Giurchescu (Romania/Denmark), Owe Ronström (Sweden), and Mariana Mardale (The Romanian Peasant Museum). The participants from the other villages were: Sunni Bloland (USA), Felföldi Laszlo (Hungary), Cyrelle Forman-Soffer (Israel), Yvonne Hunt (USA), Corina Iosif (The Romanian Peasant Museum), Mats Nilsson (Sweden), Colin Quigley (USA), Lisbet Torp (Denmark), Narcisa Știucă (Bucharest University), Helen Van Buchove (Holland).

<sup>14</sup> I will shortly mention that the main idea of the Festival is the presentation of groups which are carrier of a living tradition, able to perform in non-conventional spaces, as close as possible to the local traditional social contexts, giving the performance a participatory character

and a feeling of communion with the audience [Kurin, 1997:111-137].

<sup>15</sup> For example, at a preview in Sibiu (town of Transylvania) an uninformed, common audience considered the performance of the 'mute' as being licentious and not adequate to represent Romania abroad at the Folklife Festival [Scarlat, 2001]

<sup>16</sup> When the ritual is performed at Pentecost in the villages, the *călușari* are paid by the parents to leap over children and dance with children on their arms, actions that are believed to have positive effects. At the Folklife Festival most of the American parents did not want their children to lie down and be stepped over by *călușari*, but they were given to the *călușari* to dance with them on their arms.

<sup>17</sup> The fieldwork that I carried out together with the ethnochoreologist Silvestru Petac.

<sup>18</sup> The team of mature performers could not get together because: „*they work in the private sector and their employers don't give them free time*“ [a man in the courtyard]

<sup>19</sup> A question still remains: why are people still buying the prophylactic plants supposed to have supernatural powers after being danced by the *călușari*? The answer has much to do with social-economic instability and psychological uncertainty that still characterize this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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### *Călușari* informants of Optași-Măgura:

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