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**The Momârlan's Museum
(Elena Mălinesc and Petru Gălăţean Ethnographic Collection)**

Ana Pascu

In 2004 Elena Mălinesc and Petru Gălăţean opened the Momârlan's Museum in the village of Slătinoara, suburbia of Petroşani City that spreads on one side of the Parâng Mountains. The name of the museum suggests what its owners aimed to achieve: the reconstruction of the life of Momârlani, the 'native' population in the area. Cattle breeding has always been the basic occupation for the Momârlani, but since the First World War they have also dealt with mining, though they have been reticent about it. They live in Petroşani Depression, on the valleys of the two Jiu rivers, the East and the West Jiu and of their tributaries, but also on the sides of the the Vâlcan, Retezat and Şureanu Mountains that surround it. The origin of the word 'momârlan' is ambiguous, but the Momârlani consider themselves the remnants of the indigenous Dacian population and defined their identity in relation to the 'barabele', the foreigners who settled down the Valley once with the opening of coal mines during the Habsburg domination.

It is particularly recently that the Momârlani have restarted to decline their identity and specificity and capitalise on their heritage: *'If I had known that beforehand, [I would have collected more]. Everyone burnt all old things, they set them on fire. I could hardly recuperate anything... They asked themselves what to do with*

them. They had no idea of what might happen in the future and burnt them without realising that our customs and traditions would be lost. That's why I wanted to gather what I could! Everything bears the mark of Europe, but what about our origin? We must know what we inherit!' (Elena Mălinesc)

Five years ago the two spouses inherited a traditional old wooden house they turned into a museum. The former owner, the aunt of Petru Gălăţean, feared that her house would be pulled down after her death. This ordinary woman liked the idea of setting up a museum meant to preserve not only the memory of her death, but also the cultural context in which she lived: *'I inherited this house from my aunt who said 'When I die you are going to destroy it!' [...] 'No', said I, 'I'll turn it into a museum!' She said 'what the hell is that museum for?' Well...I explained to her what that meant and she said 'Well, I like it!' But she laughed, you know... 'Well', said she, 'if you do that I won't disturb you, otherwise I'll rise from the dead to punish you!' She was joking, of course!'* (Elena Mălinesc)

Made up of two rooms and an entrance hall, the house shelters a motley collection which mainly consists of peasant objects collected from the Momârlani with a view to standing solid proof of their still rich traditional culture: *'I*

want something like the *Village Museum of Bucharest*, which means many households and all that is typical of this area, all traditions, 'cause there are many, from baptism, [...] from birth to death.' (Elena Mălinesc) The two spouses want more than just an exhibition of a household and its extensions. They want to build an eco-museum that should be a micro-replica of the Momarlan village with sheep and sheepfolds, a wooden church and ancient occupations. Until then, they wish the museum to be integrated into a cultural tourism network, which is why they also opened a guest house ready to welcome its visitors.

The interior of the old house has remained unchanged. The two spouses preserved everything: furniture, icons and photos, clothes, fabric, a loom, ceramics, even a pick-up and old vinyl records. Elena Mălinesc rummaged in the attic and wondered through all Momarlan villages to buy objects: costumes and fabric, footwear, ceramics, pitchforks, iron tools and wooden food containers. The two owners designed the collection according to few and simple criteria: the objects must belong to local culture and be as old as possible. Costumes are the main and the most valuable component of their collection.

Elena Mălinesc chose the peasant wedding ceremony as an exhibition theme and arranged the costumes function of the importance of the roles that the participants played in the ceremony: the bride and groom's costumes hang on a wall; close to them lie the godparents' and the son-in-law's and daughter-in-law's mother and father's costumes; the elders' holiday costumes are the next important elements in so far as the wedding ceremony is concerned. Puppet-mannequins dressed in costumes carefully tailored and woven from irretrievable pieces complete the exhibition and stand for the wedding convoy. Fabric is displayed on the bed and objects for everyday use are exhibited around the floor.

The wedding guests wear holiday costumes. A flax work shirt of which the owner is very

proud is displayed next-door. The last towel woven by the former landlady can still be found on the inherited loom. Hemp and wool processing tools are scattered around the room whereas a peasant woman keeps a pitchfork in her waistband. Next to her stands a shepherd made of a wooden hanger in an original way, cooking vessels, a vessel for brewing the palinka and two kitchen cupboards with Austrian china crockery that circulated in the area lie on the oven.

Between 2008 and 2009, Elena Mălinesc refurbished the museum and rearranged the exhibition, sticking to the same theme related to the wedding ceremony of the Momarlan. The beautifully decorated wooden canteen of the 'caller', the one who invited the householders to the wedding, old and new photos representing different moments of this important point in time in the life of the family and community suggest the owners' concern with this theme. The museum is still being refurbished; male costumes are missing from the current exhibition. They will definitely find their place because a wedding without 'callers', godparents, mothers and fathers of sons and daughters-in-law and wedding guests does not mean anything.

As is usually the case, some praised them and did their best to help them, others failed to understand their retrieving action or remained indifferent. *'At first they said 'Petre and Leana are mad! They've gone mad! Why the hell do they collect the rubbish that we burn and throw away? Both are crazy! To hell with them!' They cursed us and mocked our initiative. Later on, when they heard different people saying, 'They've really got valuable things', they replied, 'What? Valuable things?' Rumours said that the objects had to be taken to the Museum of Sibiu...'* (Petru Gălăţan) The interest shown by the owners, the authorities and the ever-increasing number of tourists who cross their threshold makes the villagers become aware of the value of the old objects, but this means that they ask the owners larger sums for objects that otherwise they would throw away. However, the two

spouses continue to collect only what they can afford: *'The lady is fond of objects, she is eager to spend her last penny and even to starve in order to buy objects for the Museum.'* (Nicu)

Elena Mălinesc would like to have a better cooperation with the local authorities. She hopes that they will provide support for the rehabilitation of the road. On the other hand, the City Hall would offer them support but this cannot happen yet because the two owners have to turn the Museum into a legal person. *'I have seen his collection, I think it's a treasure of the whole community which is not yet turned to good account. He shows it to his friends, but we have to find a solution and turn this treasure into a tourist attraction.'* (Tiberiu Iacob Ridzi, mayor of Petroșani City). The City Hall offered them an exhibition space in the city but, as the two spouses believe, it is not suitable for the eco-museum they want to build. Finally, they will find cooperation solutions because both the owners and the City Hall are aware of the worth of the Momârlan's Museum.

Other people also feel the need to set up a local ethnographic museum. For instance, encouraged by the establishment of the Museum and supported by the City Hall, the priest Nicolae Octavian Pătrașcu of the Parish of Livezeni I, will also set up a museum where he intends to exhibit both religious and ethnographic objects: *'We have known our fellow Petru for long. He is addicted to traditions, costumes and objects... We congratulate them for what they do, it's very nice... Now I want to say that we haven't collected anything for our museum because we have no available space... We have just a few objects, but he doesn't have what I do. I have heritage objects, books, old icons, wood- and glass-painted icons.'*

As you can see, whether praised or criticised, Elena Mălinesc and Petru Gălățan's initiative has become, not without hesitation, a landmark in the conscience of the local community.







