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**MIRRORING THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF**  
**VARIOUS PEOPLES IN FOLK CULTURE**

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*Abstract*

Folk culture has the power of knowledge and is a common place, taken up and revived by all those who, in certain historical epochs and various ideological contexts, had something to say in this area. The forms of folk culture carry the solidest and most undisputable signs of what one may call the national feature or ethnic identity.

Today, the study of folk culture has other priorities, other goals. Before, it was a matter of asserting national identity, but now emphasis is laid on preserving and keeping that identity, given the progress of scientific thinking in this area and in relation to the primary goals at a certain moment, in one society or another, in one culture or another. Folk culture is “the way in which people think and express their thoughts, the way of expressing one’s attitudes and values that, perhaps, are not accepted when stated directly, but are still prevalent and direct people’s actions” (Wolf – Knuts, 1996, p. 300).

In this study, we shall deal with the moral and spiritual profile of various nations, which results in certain people’s tolerance or intolerance towards others with whom they have come in contact. The world of today is a changing one, in which trends of integration, globalization prevail and the question of preserving one’s cultural identity is imperiously being stated.

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**Keywords:** Folk culture, imagology, intolerance, nations, tolerance.



## 1. Introduction

Folk culture has the force of evidence and is a common place, taken up and revived by all those who, in certain historical epochs and various ideological contexts, had something to say in this field. The forms of traditional folk culture carry the solidest and most undisputable signs of what one may call the national feature or ethnic identity.

The contemporary tendency of western psychological research is to transfer and develop a large part of the ethno-psychological themes within cultural or intercultural psychology, a new and firmly established branch in the field of psychological sciences (Iacob, 2003, p. 45).

As regards the Romanian research work, the revival of ethno orientation is hopeful, particularly in terms of the emphasis laid on the research of new paradigms and methodological strategy. Imagology is already a proof of this (Iacob, 2003, p. 46).

Imagology is a discipline that was recognised as such at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences, held in Stuttgart in 1985, on which occasion a subsection entitled *L'image de l'autre*, chaired by Ms Helene Ahrweiller, was organised (Boudon, 1996, s.v. *etnologie*). Imagology explores the images that a certain people or social class have preserved in their minds, over the centuries, with regard to other people or social class. For example, how the French have seen the Germans, the Poles have perceived the Russians or how the Romanians have seen the Hungarians. Naturally, the image of a people preserved in some other people's mind starts to develop in points of contact, whether geographically or (particularly) professionally, in border provinces, or, for certain nations specialised in economic calculations, in large cities with exchange markets (the case of the Jews, the Armenians, the Chinese) (Boudon, 1996, s.v. *etno-psihologie*). The first French journal which approached imagology was *Revue de la psychologie des peuples*, which was published for almost ten years at the University of Caen, a short time after World War II (Vulcănescu, 1997, s. v. *imagologie*). As expected, imagology owes a lot to psycho-sociologies that investigated the differentiated psychology of peoples, starting with the great German thinker Eilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) and his monumental work in ten volumes *Völkerpsychologie* (published in 1910-1920), the French philosopher Alfred Fouillé (1836-1912) (*Esquisse de la psychologie des peupleseuropéens* 1902) and the Baltic Count Hermann Kayserling in his work published between the two World Wars *Das SpektrumEuropas* (translated into French as *Analyse spectrale de l'Europe*). Three other major sources which are important for the study of imagology are: a) universal history; b) paremiology (the discipline that collects and investigates proverbs, sayings and other products of folk literature), and, finally, c) universal literature.

## 2. Problem Statement

In this paper we have used bibliographical references and a number of proverbs and sayings from the culture of peoples, which we have illustrated in relation to Romanian ones. Starting from the idea that writers, too, use imagological characterisations, we have sought to prove that even folk literature has such characterisations.

### 3. Research Questions

On researching aspects of imagology in folklore, we shall attempt to answer a rather spiny question: Is imagology a science which can reflect the moral and spiritual profile of different peoples? The conclusion is that it is a topic worth researching. It is relatively recently that imagology has entered the scientific and global circuit and the media is frequently conducting imagological surveys on various peoples. The Romanians initiated the first imagological surveys in 1915, when the teacher ApostolCulea from “Cuibul cu Barză” Primary School of Bucharest asked his pupils to answer a questionnaire regarding the features of the European nations engaged in World War I. The answers mirrored, naturally, the considerations they had heard from their parents and are similar to official results of contemporary imagological surveys (Culea, 1915, p. 5-20).

### 4. Purpose of the Study

Every people has its own thesaurus of proverbs and sayings which contains numerous imagological characterisations of other usually neighbouring but also distant peoples. For instance, French sayings such as: *TrichercommeunGrec*, *Quérelled’Allemand*; *Soul comme un Polonais*; *Tête de Turc*, *Filer à l’anglaise* (this last proverb has an English counterpart: *To take French leave*).

The monumental collection of Romanian proverbs compiled by Gheorghe Zanne includes hundreds of imagological proverbs, such as: *Turcuplătește* (i.e. ‘It is the Turk who pays’); *Țiganul, când s-a văzutîmpărat, maiîntâipetatălsău l-a spânzurat* (i.e. ‘The Gypsy, seeing himself emperor, hanged his father first’); *Cal verdeșiârbcuminte* (i.e. ‘Green horse and sensible Serb’), etc. (Vulcănescu, 1997, s.v. *imagologie*), *C-o minciunăboierească, trecipestegranițanemțescă* (‘A lordly lie will get you over the German border’) (Călinescu, Vitner&Crohmălniceanu, 1953, p. 99).

### 5. Research Methods

The working methods are those used by ethnological sociology and psychology: comparative-historical, selection, deselection of folk culture elements and their analysis. The comparative-historical method is the basic method in the diachronic research of related languages and of languages in contact as well. It consists in comparing words or expressions having similar meanings in two or more languages in contact. Relying on this method, we have shown that in some languages, with which the Romanian came into contact, some expressions or proverbs have emerged as regards one language or another, the Romanian language or the language in contact. Based on this, we have shown that there are in Romanian some proverbs or expressions about cohabitant nations. Example: *Țiganul când a ajuns la mal, atunci s-a înecat*. (roughly translated as ‘It is when the Gypsy reached the shore that he drowned’) (Pann, 2001, p. 221), *A făcușiVișagrâu din călcâiepân la glezne* (which refers to someone who is poor but proud) (Pann, 2001, p.143), *Îșimănâncăcredința, cațiganulbiserica*(roughly ‘He eats his faith as the Gypsy eats his church’) (Pann, 2001, p.49), *Ovreiul, până nu înșală, nu mănâncă* (‘The Jew only eats after he cheats’) (Pann, 2001, p. 63). Another method we have used was the selection of a number of proverbs from a corpus of texts we have compiled. Be deselection, we have removed the uninteresting items. Selection is

employed in research when one works with corpora of words and expressions. Deselection is a research method by which inconclusive expressions, proverbs in our case, are eliminated.

## 6. Findings

Folklore, folk culture is the clearest and most convincing expression of the Romanians' way of being and was considered as such by renowned Romanian scholars who pioneered Romanian folkloristics like Vasile Alecsandri, Alecu Russo, Cezar Bolliac and so on. Vasile Alecsandri, who is generally referred to when speaking about the beginning of the systematic study of folklore in our country (collecting, commenting), held a real lecture on folklore and ethnic identity when he wrote, in the study *Români și poezialor* (Gazeta Bucovina, 1849, p. 10): *I have much hope in this people whose deep sensibility is engrained in plenty of proverbs, some wiser than others; whose wonderful imagination is pictured in its stories, as poetic and brilliant as eastern ones; whose satirical spirit shows itself in countless anecdotes about all the nations they have been in contact with; whose kind and generous heart is manifest in the custom of hospitality that has been kept from times of yore; whose genius at last shines so brightly in their poems that honour glorious deeds. Deep sensibility, i.e. wisdom, wonderful imagination, i.e. fantasy, satirical spirit, kind and generous heart, poetic genius* are some of the Romanians' features that the poet extracted from folk poetry, the kind of poetry that Alecsandri first brought to light and made known to nations of Europe.

Later, even the founders of folklore study as independent discipline would appeal to folk creation in order to support theses inspired by the scientific trends of the age. A popular definition of folklore was provided by Ovid Densusianu in his well-known introductory lesson to a lecture of Romance philology, published as *Folclorul - cum trebuie înțeles* (1909) (Densusianu, 1909, pp. 33-56), which is often cited.

D. Caracostea oriented his research in the same direction, aiming his studies to establish *the place of the Romanian people within European folklore*. Similarly, his contemporary, Petru Caraman from Iași, believed that the study of folklore is the most appropriate way a people can truly know themselves and sought to define *the ethnic personality of the Romanian people through the most original and personal elements of their traditional culture* (Caraman, 1989, p. 280).

Two relatively recent definitions, which are official and international since they were elaborated at the initiative of UNESCO in order to find ways of preserving folk culture thesaurus worldwide - a folk culture subjected to heavy pressures from other types of culture, non-culture or pseudo-culture -, insist precisely on the ability of folklore to constitute the most obvious expression of social and cultural identity of the group that has created and perpetuated it: *Folklore (folk and traditional culture in a broader sense) is a group or individual creation, oriented towards the group and based on tradition, which reflects the expectations of community as the most appropriate expression of its social and cultural identity; and, further, Folklore reflects the world-view of different groups, contributing to the reinforcement of these groups' identity* (Honko, 2000, p. 8).

*“A common branch of ethnology, cultural sciences, cultural sociology and psychology of nations, which deals with the study of images that peoples create of other peoples so as to characterise, admire and denigrate each other, sometimes only for the artistic pleasure to fantasise”* (Vulcănescu, 1979, p. 160).

Dealt with, in the last decades, by specialists from various fields of culture (sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, historians, historians of mentalities, etc.), the issue of individual or group identity has also drawn the attention of folklorists. In his study *Defining Identity through Folklore*, the American researcher Alan Dundes points to the correlation between personal identity and group identity, for, in both cases, it is impossible to speak about *similarity* without considering the *differences*: *There can be no self without other, no identity of group A without a group B. (...) Recognition by others is just as relevant to definitions of ethnic or other group forms of identity as it is to personal identity. (...) As there can be no self or concept of self without another, there can be no sense of group without some other group* (Dundes, 1989, p. 3).

*Its empirical orientation, the themes of characterological research, the analytical-descriptive investigation technique, the contradictory interpretation of material give imagology the appearance of a quasi-scientific, sophisticated preoccupation* (Vulcănescu, 1979, p. 3).

*“This feature is common to both traditional and contemporary Romanian ethnological research”* (Călin-Bodea, 1996, pp. 155-174).

### 6.1. International relevance

It is in this field of reciprocal imagology that one has to find the key to tolerance and mutual understanding among peoples, without interethnic frictions, in the European Union.

## 7. Conclusion

Diversity of cultures and the identity of each of them derive, at the same time, from human nature itself or, more specifically, from (unanimously) considering man as a producer (creator) of culture, of cultural values and from reconsidering man-culture relationships. In this regard, *the relationship between man and culture* is said to be *as diverse as the ways of considering man himself and, in a sense, the diversity of cultures is a durable proof of the variety of ways in which man has conceived himself* (Khirsha, 1986, pp. 324-343). As can be easily understood, it all comes down to considering man as a human being, as an individual in the philosophical sense, but in social-historical practice, man has been thinking about himself not in isolation, but as a part of a whole, a group, a community. Starting from anthropological assumptions, primary, elementary group conscience evolved into the conscience of belonging to an ethnic group that underlies the national conscience later on.

In a global world, more and more threatened by instability and terrorism, multiculturalism is striving to preserve the values of dialogue and democratic principles despite the slippages and the semantic redimensioning of the term (Oprea, 2016, p. 11).

Admission to the EU, apart from the integration of numerous ethnic identities, also meant compliance of their rights to international rules, which has always entailed an additional value. Multiculturalism has created national and universal patrimony with all its spiritual characteristics - architecture, literature, music, folklore, language, - and continues to do so. But, along with the term multiculturalism, which represents the summation of several cultures, beliefs and tendencies within the same space, all subject to international regulations, the entire arsenal of positivism and exaggerated festiveness has been adopted. “All different, all equal” is the slogan of the Council of Europe, which is

vital to cohabitation in a peaceful world. However, multiculturalism is not only “Take, Iankeși Cadâr” or games and songs performed holding hands, but also persuasive assertion of ethnic identity, revolt, racism, xenophobia or unfortunate events that occur accidentally, so very close to us (Oprea, 2016, p. 11).

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