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Fleas, Lice and Bugs
– Notes on Rural Hygiene in the Second Half of the 20th Century –

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Abstract: The paper tries to recompose a few aspects of rural hygiene on the basis of information gathered from oral inquiry. It is about the parasites which once infested the body and household of peasants – lice, fleas, bugs –, to which we added a parasitic illness by excellence – the scab. Finally, we were also interested in data upon body and clothing hygiene. All this was done with the declared aim of comparing the peasant discourse with the medical one on the same topic.

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This paper starts from an intellectual experience linked to my research programme. I worked many years ago on an ethnological subject – the imaginary of the human body, the peasants' vision[1] – for which I had to review the hygiene literature of the 19th century in order to understand the bodily representations of peasants and the pressure they were subjected to by the modern state. This literature builds a specific discourse upon peasant and rural worlds, on a few of topics, starting from body and clothing hygiene up to the matter of peasant nourishment and alcoholism in the rural world.[2] As a whole, the image the medical discourse displays upon the peasant is a profoundly negative one. I have always had great doubts regarding this discourse: is it not in some way the image that physicians are transmitting in an exaggeratedly negative way? Could they not overlook some aspects? No doubt, the medical discourse upon the rural world is an ideological one, just like any other discourse, and this image must not be considered as an objective reflection of social reality. The best proof of this fact is the existence of a parallel and opposite discourse: the positive image of the peasant and of the rural world. With a powerful identity role, this image is the cornerstone of the contemporary representations upon the peasant.

Synthesizing, in the 19th century the dominant culture uses two concurrent and opposite images upon peasants and the rural world: on the one hand the peasant

[1] Constantin Bărbulescu, *Imaginarul corpului uman. Între cultura ţărănească şi cultura savantă (secolele XIX-XX)* (The imaginary of the human body. Between peasant culture and elite culture [19th–20th century]) (Bucharest: Paideia, 2005).
[2] Constantin Bărbulescu, Vlad Popovici, *Modernizarea lumii rurale din România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea şi la începutul secolului al XX-lea. Contribuţii* (The modernization of the rural world in Romania in the late 19th – early 20th century. Contributions) (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2005), 9–25.

is seen as the primitive element in one's own society – the bad peasant – that needs to be civilized, and on the other hand it is seen as peasant identity – the good peasant – who is the *Romanian* by excellence, leading eventually to the idealization of the peasant.

The negative image upon the peasant is much older and goes back to the Middle Ages, the 19th century only perpetuated it; the positive image is a novelty: its beginnings can be placed to the second half of the 18th century, but it is not farfetched to assert that it remains essentially a creation of the following century. In the 20th century the positive image becomes general, and hence derives the stupor of the contemporary researcher in front of the texts by 19th-century physicians that describe the peasant and his world. The present text was born exactly from this kind of confrontation and the questions it triggered. But let us go back to the research itself.

Hence I may say I took the relay race: I partially took the grid through which the physicians of the 19th century regarded the rural world, I transformed it into a questionnaire and applied it on the field. In other words, I tried to see if the peasants nowadays share the same image upon the hygiene of the world they live in as the physicians of the 19th century.

There have been many methodological problems from the beginning: firstly, the interviews were taken from informers born generally after 1930, while the medical discourse refers to the second half of the 19th century; thus we have a gap of approximately one century between the two images. Secondly, I did not apply in my fieldwork the whole set of problems the medical discourse had developed; I only considered a few aspects. Thirdly, the medical discourse refers to the Old Kingdom [Moldavia and Valachia], while the field research has in view a number of villages situated in Cluj County.[1] Despite all these disparities, it seemed to me that the research through oral inquiry keeps its interest.

First, I started with a kind of hygienic *ecology*, that is, information upon the parasites in the past whose existence is ascribed to lack of hygiene. Then, I was interested in an illness, seen as a consequence of dirty body and clothing: the scab; and finally, I gathered material upon bodily and clothing hygiene.

Since the beginning, as a general assertion, one must notice that the informants, when describing the status of hygiene in the time of their childhood, that is, the 1930s through 1950s of the past century, have a perception similar to that of the physicians upon the rural world at the end of the 19th century. The hygienic state was catastrophic. It is generally linked to the general living conditions. It is asserted constantly that the low level in living conditions and poverty induce a precarious hygienic state.

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[1] The field work was conducted in a few rural communities in Cluj County, researched in the summer of 2009: Finişel village, and Râşca and Mociu townships. The inquiries in Finişel were made by Ioana Alina Şuta and those from Mociu and Râşca by Elena and Constantin Bărbulescu. The research was financed through a CNCSIS grant, Idei type, code 1647, by the title: "Reception of Modernization of the Romanian Communist Sanitary System in the Rural World (1948–1989)". Information gathered from Râşca township at a previous date has also been used on occasions.

The Lice

Of all the insects that parasitize the peasant's body, the most important is lice. They create the richest discourse, even though, as we shall see, they do not seem the most fearsome. Furthermore, the lice are divided into two big categories according to the area they parasitize: hair or clothing; we speak of "hair lice" and "clothing lice". They seem to be quite well known as long as they can still be described: '*the clothing lice are white and they have on their back a black [spot], and they are chubby, fattier. The head ones are smaller'* (Rasca, b. 1930[1]).

As all parasites, the appearance of lice is also due to "bad living" associated with the lack of elementary hygiene, as an informant confesses in a surprising formula: "*On unwashed and badly living [people]; I didn't have it, dear. I didn't have it because I was alone and we had what to eat".* (Finişel, b. 1934). But it was also believed that lice could appear following the use of certain hygienic products! Washing with soap can be dangerous! "*And it was then a kind of soap, after the war, they said they were making it from oil, and from that soap if you washed your hair, the other day you had it all over…one day or two, in two days there were those tiny-tiny ones. In the hair, they came from that soap"* (Mociu, b. 1935). We are here in a full mythology of hygienic products![2]

For the reference period, lice were present in the villages where we did the research, but they were not ubiquitous. The most affected groups seemed to be the marginal people of Romanian society – the Romani: "*I took the lice from school, there were gypsies, there were gypsies in the class, I know they were gypsies, they had rich hair, rich-rich, it was that rich: that was the place for lice. And we got them too, the girls; mother had a rich-rich hair and she got it, ouch! Well we washed with oil a few times, we combed, we washed, 'cause this is how they said; we washed with oil and they all went away, they died. And mother kept on combing us with a dense comb, as it was taking the eggs too, because there were eggs! And we were cured*" (Mociu, b. 1937). But a similar situation applied also to a professional category, if we may call it this way, namely, the 'servants'[3], who were not much cared for in the families where they were 'hired'. The childhood memories of some informants from Râşca do not even come close to those described by Ion Creangă about a century before: "*They were servants, because they were sixteen brothers, but they died, they didn't live all and the parents gave them to be servants. And where there was a servant there were so many lice, they said they were climbing during the day up towards Mărişel, on a rock, in a tree,*

[1] I inserted between the brackets the settlement where the interview was made and the year of birth of the informant.

[2] I have to relate this information to a personal experience from the other side of the country, Oltenia: sometime during the '80s, I had lice. My parents were convinced that the parasites came up after using a shampoo, namely, the tar shampoo.

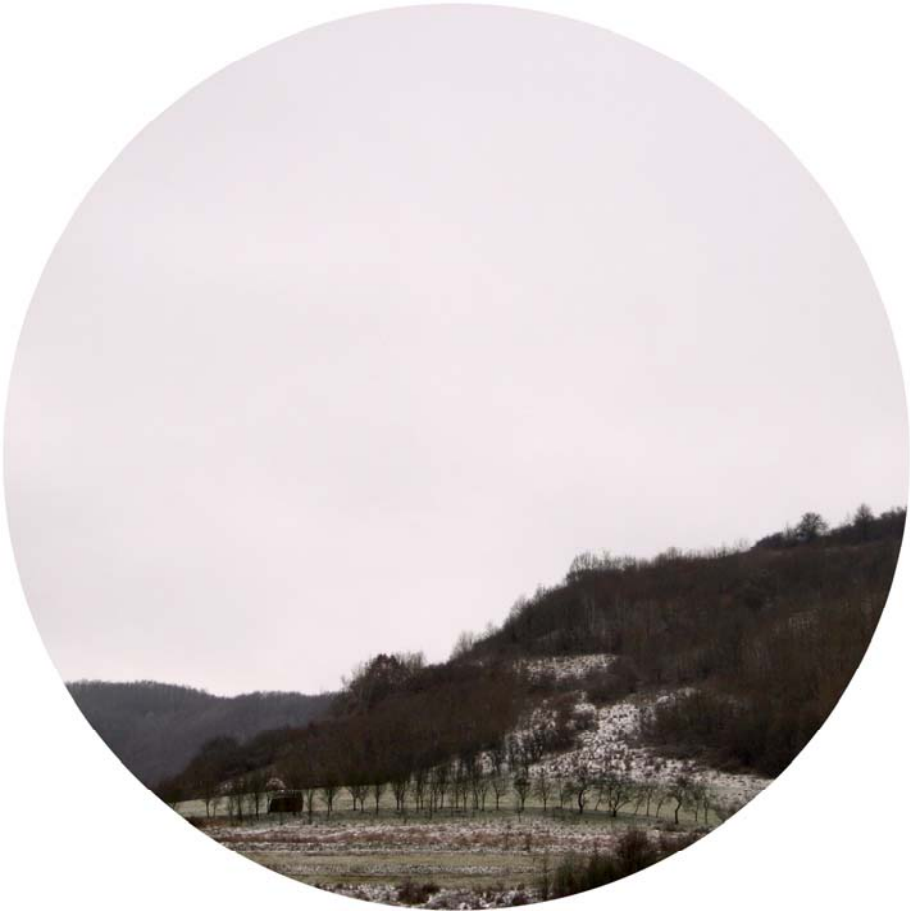
[3] In all areas studied, there seem to be children who, for various reasons, are 'hired' for a determined period of time by families that can afford to support them. The phenomenon is multiform, and it is not always perceived as a negative experience. Unfortunately in social sciences in Romania there are no researches on this topic. From our field research, the subject – we never approached it systematically – seems to be of fabulous richness.

and they thought that if they throw the lice from up there, they will die, poor boys, oh, God! They said they kept on taking until they reached one hundred. From them, from clothes and from where they were. After they counted one hundred they said: 'enough let them be, now let's get down from here'" (Râşca, b. 1941). Other testimonies send us to the world of anecdotes where the smart Păcala, as an 'employee', baffles the plans of the priest as 'employer' by taking revenge this way. Sometimes the revenge takes original shapes: "*My husband said that he was servant in Bica, and they put him to sleep in the stable and he was full of lice and in the house there were two women. And they had such cleanliness…extraordinary! And he said he thought one day 'May the poorness eat you! You sit in such cleanliness and you don't wash me?! To put me somewhere to sleep where the lice won't eat me up…' He said he took a box of matches, empty, and staying all day with the animals to pasture, he collected the lice and put them in that box. And in the evening he thought: 'now I will make you be full of lice like me if you don't wash me, a child!' He went in and he said that they had a quilt with a white sheet, and he sat on the edge of the bed and threw the lice in the bed and he took the box back, so that they would not notice what he did. After two or-three days he just saw the women washing and cleaning everything in the house! Well he thought: 'aren't you good! If you cannot wash me, now wash yourselves!' then he said: 'I am not afraid they did not walk!', 'cause if they got into those quilts, sewed by hand, they laid eggs there, and you can hardly get rid of them. He thought: 'let them be!' cause they put him to sleep in a blanket. They took his blanket boiled it… 'Well, this is for you to wash me too not only yourselves!' He was lucky with that 'because he got rid of lice, but they were eaten by lice…they don't even know how much!*" (Râşca, b. 1941).

Not only the servants suffered a massive infestation; the situation seems to have been the same in the case of shepherds, and also with the soldiers during the Second World War. The image of lice crawling on soldiers' clothes remained in the mind of an informant: "*Those [lice] I didn't see until the army came, the army with the war, and then I did see lice. They came it was full of army at our place; and they washed and put their clothes on the fence to dry. And mother went to the well to fetch water and when she came she said: 'They have lice, they just wet their clothes and if you go and look at the fence, the lice are crawling on their shirts'. And so it was. I went after water and I watched and there were lice. Till then I didn't see any lice".* (Mociu, b. 1922).

Lice are not exclusively found on man, big domestic animals and also poultry, all have what our informants call 'lice': "*The cows, cows, and pigs! Oh, the cows were so full of lice here around their ears, you know how it was? Black! Black-black-black! Here at the ears and on the neck and head they were. Oh, you know how my father treated it? With tobacco juice, because we had tobacco then, and they boiled the tobacco, they made that juice and they washed them with that juice and the lice died. And on the pigs I saw; well on the pigs there were these big lice, on the pigs: big, big, almost like ticks, you know? And they were around, my mother said: 'Well, look how many lice this pig has; it will be a fat one'. They said that the pig which has lice will grow fat. And I said to mother: 'Mother, look the lice are eating the pigs, piglets', because the sow farrowed and they put on them also. I said: 'Mother, let's oil them!' And we oiled them with a little Diesel oil. The*

oil is good, the normal household oil with yeast (...), that is good cause it destroys them" (Mociu, b. 1937). So each species has its lice, which do not go from one species to the other, a fact expressed by my peasants in a more eloquent way though: *"Which stays on man does not stay on cows; which stays on cows, doesn't stay on man"* (Finişel, b. 1950).



Irina Dumitraşcu, *Untitled Landscape 41*
Photogrpahy – Cprint, ø 40cm, 2010

Lice are seen in the peasant world as a sort of unavoidable calamity, as long as it is transmitted easily from one person to the other. It is enough for a few foci of infection to be formed inside the community and the danger is for all. The small parasites infest the public spaces, or rather the socializing places: the *hora*, the mill, the school. They are the parasites of peasant socialization: they are transmitted in the socialization places but for this reason they are shaping socialization as well. Visits to the families known to have lice are avoided, or much worse, the transmission of the parasites in certain situations can be catastrophic, as it is the case of an informant who tells at his old age with great humour how his potential

marriage plans were stopped by lice: "*When I was a lad I went to Dângău, to a dance, at Epiphany. And there it was, a wall between two rooms was cut so as to have a bigger room for dancing; and there were some abutments where everybody threw their clothes. It was Epiphany, warm and I threw there and… I was with a teacher from here. We threw the clothes over. In the evening we left: he to one girl I to another; there they put clean sheets. There we went with our clothes taken from the pile, but I don't know if we let or not lice there, cause the next day we came home both of us. (…) And it was* hora *here, I mean dancing. We came with the teacher here; the school was near – quickly to change our shirts, because we were sweating. And I changed my shirt and as I put it there…we didn't have wardrobe, I just threw it over the others, the teacher came to me and said: 'Vasile*[1]*, have you changed?' 'I have'. He said: 'Give me your shirt.' 'Why should I give it to you?' 'Well mine is so full of lice that I can't tell!' 'Don't tell me!' 'Come on give me your shirt'. And they were on my shirt, too. Now we were so ashamed! Did we take lice from there and then we slept… we went to neat girls who laid their best bed-linen for us and we left lice there; we suspected. Nobody told us anything, but…And believe me or not, I was ashamed to continue seeing that girl!*" (Râşca, b. 1930).

Still, peasants have made desperate efforts to drive away the danger from the private space. Here the main role is taken by the woman as it is known that all the activities belonging to personal and house hygiene are a woman's task. There are many techniques of protection from lice. The most frequently mentioned one is of preventive nature: when somebody has to go in a place potentially dangerous from this point of view, for example a mill, before they enter the house when coming back they simply take off all clothes: "*We went down there to the mill, and everybody went there; and we used to stay during night, you slept where you could, we came back with the donkey, mother just took the flour from the donkey: 'Come to the cellar and take your clothes off'. This is it: she knew I brought lice from the mill*" (Râşca, b. 1940). The infested clothes were boiled and if the infestation was not treated in the primary state, the results were very unpleasant: "*When they enter the bed linen, it is very tough!*" (Râşca, b. 1944). Only those who experienced something similar, even if not necessarily linked to lice, know what it takes to hygienize a dwelling; obviously, in case some strong pesticides are missing. Our informants talk about the appearance, during the '50s, of the miraculous DDT, or earlier the equally efficient "green of Paris".

The peasant discourse confesses a permanent fear of infestation, since anyone could get it anytime. Among these prophylactic measures this time for hair lice, there is a strictly feminine practice of greasing the hair with lamp oil. Here the hygienic reasons are combined with aesthetical ones: oil not only had a disinfecting role but also gave a specific shine to the hair, much appreciated by our informants.

Bed Bugs

Among the domestic parasites the most famous seem to be bed bugs. They represent the major aversion and they are singularized in an olfactory code: "*They smell badly*" (Râşca, b. 1930), which characterizes also the solution used against

[1] For deontological reasons all the names are changed.

them. Another feature is that they hide in the cracks of wood greatly used in building the dwelling and furniture. In conclusion, their eradication proved quite difficult. But their 'good' fame was not given only by the difficulty in killing them but also by their aggressiveness: "*Those were bad! They were so going to children. Ouch, they bite the kids! When you turned on the light at night, they ran so fast! And to the bed, there was only a small crack, they go in there and when you turned off the lamp they went to the children. They bit them so hard; they could not sleep all night*" (Râşca, b. 1943).

Sometimes aggressiveness can be fatal, especially when it comes to human parasites. It is the case of bed bugs, which already in the period researched, are no longer known. The older informants still know them, and they saw them, but we may say that starting with the '60s they only seldom infest the private space. On the other hand, they can be seen where you expect them the least, as one informant recalls: "*[Bugs] I saw, I saw, but at the hospital. I was in the seventh grade and I wove some carpets for the school manager and the administrator had the same pattern, and they wanted them to be ready by Easter. Well, we did it for the manager, instead of going out during the break we went weaving. And during holiday the administrator called me and two other colleagues to go and finish, because they were family friends and it had to be ready. Because we knew the pattern… a carpet, three meters long and two and a half wide, we had a high carpet loom. And there I saw. He told us to stay over night and sleep there in the hospital. The administrator lived there in the hospital. And I slept in their kitchen, me and a colleague. The other colleague, her father worked in the hospital, and she slept at her place. Me and my friend we slept in one bed in the kitchen. I could not sleep all night. I said: 'You Ileana, I can't sleep, something is biting me, biting me all the time, let me sleep by the wall, maybe…' I slept next to the wall, even harder. And then I saw the bugs. But when you turned on the light they ran. It was a small red bug, as I remember. And that was eating me, and it was me it bit, I don't know why*" (Mociu, b. 1922).

What the level of discomfort, as we may call it, that these parasites produce is proven by the general attitude of our informants when they talk about them: while in the case of lice we have humorous presentations and the atmosphere is quite relaxed, in the case of bugs the discussion takes a very serious note. There's no joking with bugs!

The Fleas

In the parasite system of the peasant household, fleas represent the base: they are everywhere and we can almost say they have been forever, and are even today quite frequently met in the household. They do not trigger a real reaction of rejection in the peasant world, as is the case of lice and bed bugs. Proof of it is the fact that the informants almost never felt the need to mention the way they 'got rid of' fleas. They simply cohabitated with them.

It is certain however that the peasant discourse presents the image of a world completely infested by fleas. "*Well there were fleas, because the houses did not have wooden floors, when you stepped on that clay, as we were barefoot, they climbed so many on your feet, that you could not kill them*" (Râşca, b. 1929). It

seems that in their case the infestation is not regulated in terms of presence/absence as in the case of lice and bugs, but in quantitative terms: many/few. They are and become annoying and impossible to tolerate only when they are too many: "*I went to the baths at Sângeorz, in fifty-eight; if you walked on the street you got fleas. In Sângeorz. When I reached there to go to the baths, I went to the railway station, we went into the coach and a man said: 'Well now we go to fleas and smell of whey'. He said so. So many shepherds were, cheese all over …and so, many fleas! I went to a house there to rent it: could you sleep from fleas?! I bought a manual pump and some solution and disinfected the entire house (…) so many they were. I went to church, as they were with white clothes, like this were fleas riding that man in the church. Yeah, until recently, fresh thing!*" (Râşca, b. 1930).

Whereas in the case of lice and bed bugs the transmission is done from man to man, in the case of fleas, cats are reputed to infest the man with their own parasites: "*Fleas I had once, I had a cat and didn't know, when we lived in the old house; it came and brought them …I quarrelled with my husband, for bringing fleas in my bed. I said: 'You brought them from where you were'. And when the cat came inside I just saw her scratching: she had the fleas. I don't let the cat inside the house ever since, but I no longer have fleas either*" (Finişel, b. 1941). Are we dealing here with an exception? Possibly, but I am not sure. We also have to have in mind the negative status of the cat in the peasant culture.

If we are to classify all these parasites depending on the discomfort they produce, bed bugs are obviously at the top of the hierarchy; then lice follow, and finally we have the fleas. This hierarchy can be superposed on another, depending on the order of their disappearance from the rural world. In other words, the most fearsome parasites – the bed bugs – are the less known as they have become rare. I myself never saw bed bugs. Lice have an intermediary position being at the mid-distance between fleas and bugs; they are known, almost everybody had or at least saw them. And fleas are at the bottom of the hierarchy, quasi-harmless, tolerated and thus still present in the rural household.

The Scab

In the peasant discourse a famous illness has individualized: the scab. Our informants rarely associated scab with lack of bodily hygiene, but generally the illness – considered highly contagious – was transmitted from an infected person or animal. Due to its contagious character, the scab, similarly to lice, infects the topography of peasant socialization, as it can be contacted in school for example: "*Mother and father were clean people, and so were my grandparents, but we took it from school! When I was in the first grade I was sharing the desk with a boy, they put us like this: a boy and a girl; and he was… he had no mother. His father remained with eight kids, he had no mother; only father. I saw he was all wounds here [between his fingers]. And the teacher comes and asks us to put our palms on the desk to see our nails, we had to cut our nails and she saw Gheorghe was full of wounds. Gheorghe grasped my hair, if we were sharing the desk! And I was full of it, too! I just saw blisters. I went home, all the girls took it, mother, father and that was trouble! That trouble not to tell anyone! It was so itchy that you felt you were dying. What was to do? Well it was scab. Mother and father knew it was scab.*

Father went to Cluj and bought some ointment. There were two bottles of ointment, we salved I don't remember how many evenings in a row, mother made some ash from maize, tough-tough: we were all bleeding, to kill the microbe. Because we were told this way, I don't know who, the teacher or somebody told mother and she did and we…and mother changed also clothes, when we slept she put other linen, bad linen till we were cured. And that was how we were cured" (Mociu, b. 1937). But the other places of socialization are not exceptions from contagion: scab can be taken at dancing as the sister of one informant in Râşca had in her youth: "*that was… right when my sister was a maid. I didn't get it but they had before. Because lads were going to maids, at that time there was no disco, it was only dancing; on Saturday night lads went to maids (…) she went with a lad one evening, and in the morning her skin was itching*" (Râşca, b. 1944). And we could continue forever with such examples…

But any illness has its remedy, and scab is no exception. What singularizes the remedy of this illness, especially the serious forms, is the pain it causes, either by using a modern remedy bought from the pharmacy, or a traditional remedy – washing with lye: "*the scab was on him, poor guy, we washed with lye, we made lye [from ashes of beech], me and my father, and I washed him with that lye and with ointment. And he stayed there in warmth, we had an oven in the cottage. And he stayed on the oven when we made bread to get warm. The lye was burning! And he tumbled down as if dying! He hardly got rid of it, in one year! I'll never forget it!*" (Râşca, b. 1944).

Scab, a parasite illness, could provoke serious epidemics in certain conditions. Anyway, before the '60s of the past century, childhood or youth without scab was hard to conceive.

Bodily and Clothing Hygiene

As I have mentioned above, in the peasant discourse the status of hygiene in the rural world is directly correlated with the general living standard. In other words, serious poverty leads to a precarious hygienic state. The two aspects of rural social life are interrelated. In practice, this pattern should not verify automatically. Is it not so again that the elites are speaking through the voice of peasants? It is a hypothesis that further research will have to confirm … or not.

Till then the peasant discourse upon bodily and clothing hygiene – the only aspects of peasant hygiene we had in view – only partially overlap with the medical discourse on the rural world that I referred to at the beginning of this study. For example, in the case of clothing hygiene physicians asserted that in the rural world it was practically non-existent;[1] bodily hygiene likewise. Still at the middle of the past century peasants said they were washing their clothes: "*You know how we washed the clothes first at the parents? We had a pail, and we put the clothes in there, because many were made of hemp then. Then, at those times many were made*

[1] Gh. Crăiniceanu, *Igiena ţăranului român. Locuinţa, încălţămintea şi îmbrăcămintea. Alimentaţia în diferitele regiuni ale ţării şi în diferitele timpuri ale anului* (The Romanian peasants' hygiene. Nutrition around the year in different regions of the country) (Bucharest: Lito-tipografia Carol Göbl, 1895), 153.

of hemp; and we arranged them, the sheets, because they were made of hemp, and we had these other ones but we used mostly those, as these new ones we used at holidays; and we put one sheet on top and we put ash, and we boiled water on the stove and poured on that lye, so that the lye would go on the clothes and we let them till they were almost cold and we went in the valley and took a chair and with the mallet beat every piece and rinsed it in the water, as the water was clean. We lived near the water stream. We beat them with the mallet few times, and then we rinsed them and packed them and took them at home and laid them outside, and they were very well washed! So that's how we washed!"(Finişel, b. 1941). Could any physician have not seen at the end of the 19th century how peasant women were washing clothes in the rivers? Could he have not known that even if they did not use soap, the ash they were using was an excellent substitute? It is hard to believe that in 1940, the peasants knew the benefits of lye and in 1890, they didn't.

A similar situation we find in the case of bodily hygiene. At the end of the 19th century physicians said that the peasants never took a bath. But again, our informants constantly referred to the weekly baths, on Saturdays. Not because of hygienic reasons in the modern sense, but due to the fact that the next day they had to enter the sacred space of the church. And to the meeting with God you should not go slovenly! We know from Norbert Elias that some norms of behaviour we consider today as having a hygienic nature, did not have this meaning at their origin[1]. If this time we regard both the medical discourse upon the bodily hygiene of the rural people, and also the peasant discourse upon their own bodily hygiene, as both being plausible, then the result is that sometime between the late 19th – mid-20th century, the weekly bath became a habit in the rural world. Was it indeed so? We do not know for sure, now. But we know for example for other regions that the professor of hygiene at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris began his lecture in 1935 by saying: "Maintenant que l'usage du bain hebdomadaire commence à se rèpandre..."[2]. It is hard to believe that the situation in Romania was any better than in France.

As a conclusion, I would like to point out in short the traps of the two types of discourses I have worked with in this article: the medical discourse[3] and the peasant discourse. Both are in fact ideological constructions and only partially and distortedly reflect the social reality of the past. It is equally difficult to reconstruct the hygienic state of the rural population by using both the physician's regard and that of the peasants themselves. As an ethnologist I realize that the medical discourse upon the rural world is not innocent: it is excessively, impermissibly generalizing; it withholds many aspects of peasant life, and sees this entire world in a negative light. I thought that these characteristics of the medical discourse upon

[1] Norbert Elias, *Procesul civilizării. Cercetări sociogenetice şi psihogenetice*, vol. 1 (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), 156–157.

[2] Maurice Tubiana, *Histoire de la pensée médicale. Les chemins d'Esculape* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 456–457.

[3] For a more detailed description of the medical discourse upon rural world see Bărbulescu, Popovici, *Modernizarea lumii rurale din România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea şi la începutul secolului al XX-lea. Contribuţii*, 9–25.

the rural world are due to the receiver. In other words, physicians offer a discourse for the use of political elites. It is true. But on the other hand, in the 19th century the distinction between They (peasants) and Us (elite) was much more underlined than it is today. The two Romanias were more clearly defined and the cultural distance between them was much greater. So was the hatred. It was still possible to publish in that age texts in medical journals in which peasants were represented as being in an animal stage; or they could write, as a general rule, about their hygienic customs for example, on a condescending and ironic tone. Today it is much more difficult to publish something like that, quite impossible. Consequently, the characteristics of the medical discourse upon the rural world are not exclusively owed to the receiver, but partially to the emitter as well.

As far as the peasant discourse upon rural hygiene is concerned, it seems more truthful, even if compared to the medical one. Still, here we could have dangers too about the same emitter–receiver relation. This time, the peasant is the emitter and the Other is the receiver. The danger comes here from the fact that the emitter creates a self-image in agreement with the expectations of the receiver, especially today when the two Romanias, even though distinct, share the same social values. In other words, when we talk, for example, of rural hygiene, peasants are only trying to prove that They are like Us. Even though, once, because of poverty, They were not quite like Us.