

Symbolical Mechanisms for Restoring Communal Equilibrium in the Romanian Folk Culture*

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Abstract: This study presents the manner in which traditional Romanian communities tend to perceive crisis situations triggered by theft or murder, and the way in which individuals respond to these situations, through symbolical acts and representations of intra-community social balance adjustment. This material explores one of the most widespread folk rituals, which has been updated and adapted to criminal contexts: searching for culprits by way of “bucket divination” (drawing lots by means of a water-filled basin). The mechanisms for regulating intra-community crises analysed in this paper were identified during a field research conducted in Transylvania, especially in its rural areas. The interpretation proposed here relies on the grid Mary Douglas develops in her classical study of cultural anthropology, entitled *Purity and Danger*.¹

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In traditional Romanian communities, especially in the rural areas, crime (theft, murder) is perceived as a form of disorder, an offence against the order of a cultural system. In the terms of Mary Douglas, the British anthropologist, crime represents a form of “symbolic pollution”: “Dirt offends against order. [...] Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.”² Order and disorder are interdependent concepts, because “there is no ‘symbolic pollution’ except if and to the extent to which there is a ‘symbolic order.’”³

“Each culture must have its own notions of dirt and defilement which are contrasted with its notions of the positive structure which must not be negated.”⁴ Thus, the crisis triggered through pollution involves, necessarily, a ritual for restoring order and for re-establishing the social and moral equilibrium. “Any ‘pollution’ of order, whether cosmic or social, major or merely accidental, is followed by sanctions or

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¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002; originally published: 1966).

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie. Cinci introduceri* (Anthropology. Five Introductions) (Iaşi: Polirom, 2007), 29.

⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 196.

purification rites, designed to reaffirm the communal order, and every society will equip itself with such sanctions and rites in order to maintain the order they deem to be good.”¹

This study examines a mechanism of psychological, moral and social cleansing, which has been updated for crisis situations. This mechanism is manifested through a rite of elimination, pertaining to the category of scapegoat rites,² and may be subsumed within the system of pollution and purification. This is a custom of considerable antiquity, which is also currently practised in several localities from the counties of Cluj, Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Sălaj, Mureș, Sibiu, Brașov, Covasna (and sporadically in Vâlcea); however, Romanian ethnology has not inventoried it yet.³ The ethnographic material under analysis here has been collected during personal field research.

The custom is called *bucket divination*⁴ (a form of water-in-basin divination, or *lecanomancy*) and consists in organising a séance for the purposes of fortune telling, gaining insight or receiving revelation, followed by building a narrative around a bucket of water, and by disseminating this narrative amidst the community.

In many – especially rural, but also urban – localities from Transylvania, in cases of theft or murder, a woman from the victim’s family will invite several clean children, mostly girls (their number, gender and age vary from village to village and from one period to another), on a Sunday morning, under ritual purity conditions (abstinence from food and drink). They are led by an old woman, who is also ritually clean: she is a widow, absolved from sin (fulfilling, thus, the condition of ritual cleanliness) and well known in the village as an extremely devout woman. In many places, there is even a specialist in these matters. Sometimes, several elderly women – up to seven – participate in the ritual, which most often takes place in the victim’s house, while the Sunday liturgy is celebrated in church. The children kneel around a bucket filled with water, in which various symbolic objects (basil, a cross, a ring, etc.) are immersed. A mysterious atmosphere is created, conducive to revelations: the windows of the room are covered, the participants hold lighted candles in their hands, they are covered with blankets or sheets, etc. There follows a period of intense concentration,

¹ Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie*, 29.

² René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Hachette, 1972); René Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

³ In the specialized Romanian bibliography, there is a single study on this practice, authored by the undersigned: *Explorând un ritual (Exploring a Ritual)* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2007). On the other hand, there are two outstanding contributions on this topic in Hungarian ethnography, signed by Professor Vilmos Keszeg, “A Cseberbenézés (Egy mezősegi hiedelemem eredete és szemantikája)” (Bucket divination (The origins and semantics of a belief)), *Néprajzi Látóhatár*, I/1–2 (1992), and “Egy látomás. Az esemény, a reprezentáció és az ítékezés” (A vision. The event, the representation and the judgement), in Keszeg Vilmos, *Homo narrans. Emberek, történetek és kontextusok* (Cluj-Napoca: Komp-Press, 2002).

⁴ This study proposes a different perspective from that suggested in the volume entitled *Explorând un ritual (Exploring a Ritual)*. This is a reflection on the bucket divination custom, seen through the lenses of the anthropological grid formulated by Mary Douglas in the aforementioned study. It also valorises suggestions derived from René Girard’s theories on scapegoat mechanisms.

actuated by prayers and incantations, which are uttered almost incessantly. During all this time, the children stare at the water until they “see” faces or movements in it – these will identify the circumstances of the theft/murder and the portrait of the thief/murderer. The phantasms detected in the hallucinatory obscurity of the water are then defined and outlined, through verbal explication, by the entire group. The vision is guided through the questions posed by the adults and is pieced together, like a puzzle, from bits of images the participants claim to glimpse in the bucket, from the participants’ words and from later additions. The narrative built in this context is then voiced throughout the village by the injured family, their neighbours and relatives. The story spreads rapidly and is invested with the force and credibility of the truth that has been revealed by divine miracle: the interlocutors claim that everything that “is revealed” in the basin comes “from God.” Thus, the suspect, whether guilty or not, is known and stigmatised by the community. The psychological, moral and social balance is restored in this way.

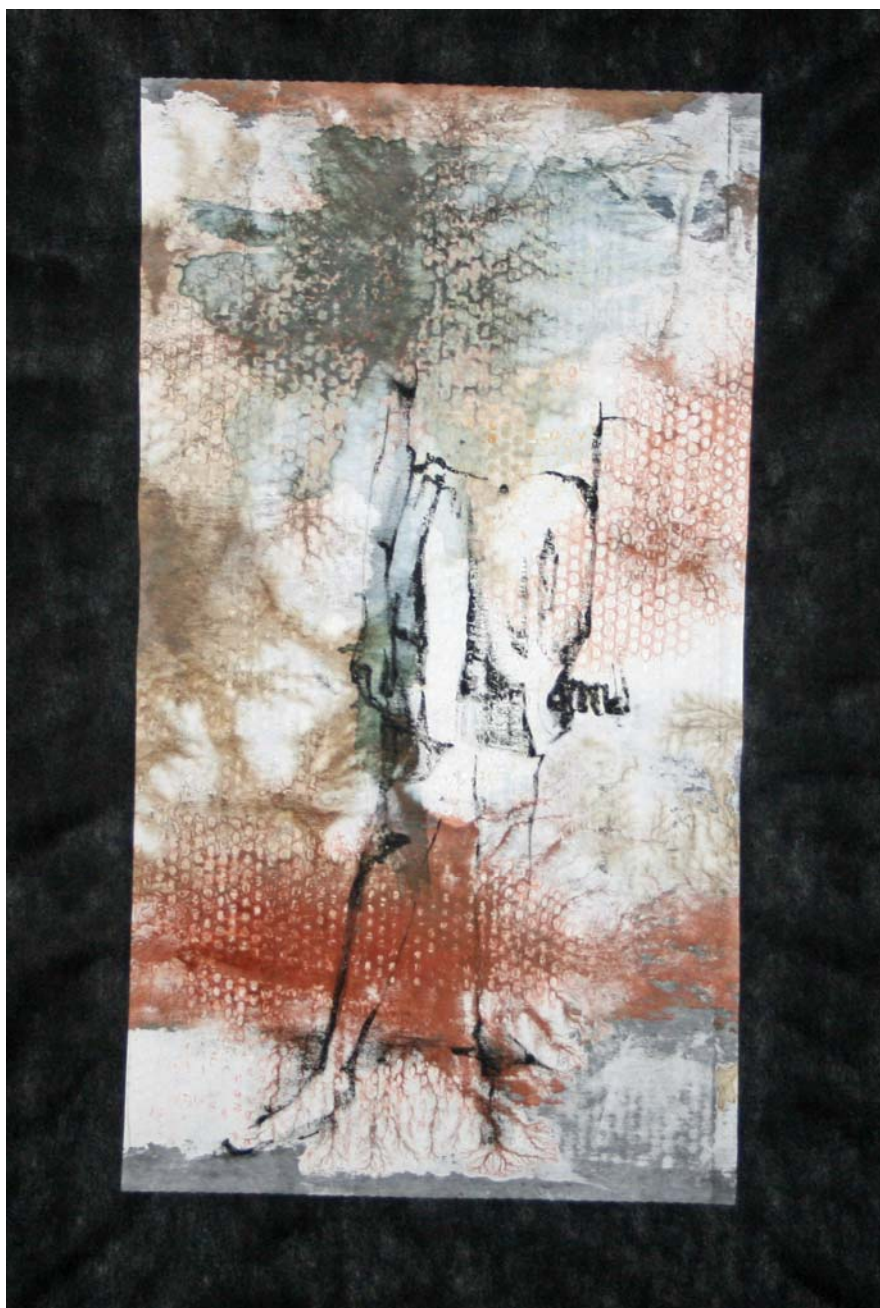
By way of exemplification, I shall transcribe a fragment from an interview with M. S., from Pianu de Sus, Alba County:

“Let me tell you about a case: someone, a neighbour had her money stolen. That was several years ago. [...] She had a certain amount of money stolen. And there was this friend who kept coming by their children. And they thought of him, they thought he might have done it, but if you didn’t see him with your own eyes, you can’t be sure. And they did this thing with the bucket. And the girls who were there said that a starry sky appeared, they could see the stars in the sky in the bucket, and after a time, he appeared. She says: ‘There’s Laie!’ That’s what the boy was called. ‘There’s Laie!’ And they showed him, how he went to the cupboard, how he took the money, how he put it in his pocket, and so then, it’s a real thing, it proves to be true. After they found out, the rumour spread, sure, and he wouldn’t admit it, not the first time. He wouldn’t admit it. And then they told him: look, we did the bucket thing and you were seen. And then, eventually, he confessed. I don’t know if he gave her the money back, but he admitted: yes, indeed, it was me. That’s a case that I know for sure it happened, 15 years ago.”¹

The custom has a rather widespread distribution area and unexpected vivacity: it is still performed at present (though not in all the localities where it used to be practised in the past). As a result of the research undertaken, we found evidence of bucket divination in 85 localities – villages and towns – from nine counties. The highest frequency of the ritual was encountered in Bistrița-Năsăud County (33 localities). Next, in descending order, came the following counties: Cluj (20 localities), Alba (11 localities), Mureș (eight localities), Brașov (7 localities), Sibiu (2 localities), Sălaj (1 locality), Covasna (1 locality), Vâlcea (1 locality).

It is important to note that, over time, this ritual has undergone some surface changes, which have enabled it to survive and adapt to new realities: the use of plastic buckets, instead of the old, wooden basins, as well as a decrease in the number of children participating in the ritual, from 9 or 7 in the past to only 5 or even 3 at present, because of the aging rural population and the difficulty of finding enough children, but also for reasons related to the changing mentality of the young.

¹ Field information, Pianu de Jos, Alba County, 8 February 2007 (interviewee M. S., 72 years old).



Teodora Cosman, *Untitled (The Three Graces)*, from the series „Jeux the Mémoire”,
90 x 60 cm, acrylic on synthetic tissue, 2010

The ritual is built on several levels: a symbolical level – involving symbols, meanings and practices; a social level – including social roles and statuses, relationships between the individuals of the community, etc.; a psychological level – concerning, on the

one hand, the pressure exerted on the suspect (who is denounced as the culprit) and on the other hand, the injured party's regaining their psychological balance; and a mentality level – built on the belief in the power of absolute justice, of divine essence, entrusted with making the truth surface and with restoring the individual (psychological, social, moral) and collective balance. These functional levels communicate amongst them within a whole, unified as they are by shared cultural perceptions on symbolical practices. It is such a perception that has been able to maintain the ritual and nurture its metamorphoses.¹

This study proposes a five-point analysis of this custom, by placing it in the category of symbolical mechanisms that regulate intra-community crises (of the *scapegoat* type).

1. The ritual of bucket divination is a symbolical practice,² capable of reversing the pollution caused by a crime. This must be its main stake, since in most cases, its performance lacks visible efficiency either on the concrete-material level (most of the times, the stolen goods are not recovered), or on the legal-official level (it is not accepted as evidence in court or as proof, by the police authorities).

2. The violence that crime unleashes is experienced in terms of a crisis by all the community members, who rally together in the face of evil. Many of the localities that have been investigated are multi-ethnic, comprising Romanians (they represent the majority population), Hungarians and Roma. The ritual under analysis is performed by all, with no ethnic restrictions or conditioning, even though there is the assumption that its origins are Romanian, having been borrowed by the other ethnic groups during their long-term cohabitation.³ A consistent pattern of thinking may be detected: there is one single type of response to crisis, to the evil that comes from outside and, hence, cannot be kept under control. From a confessional perspective, the ritual participants are mostly Orthodox. There are, amongst them, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, etc.: regardless of their denomination, in the event of theft or murder, some people try to find the culprit with the help of the bucket. Even when the ritual is polarised around the personality of an Orthodox priest, the fact that the performers belong to another religion is not an impediment. Girls or women of another denomination (Reformed, Pentecostal, Catholic) can also participate in the ritual. In certain localities, the Orthodox priest recommends the parishioners to gaze at the basin and look for the culprit therein, and women from the victim's family will appeal to this ritual, regardless of their confessional affiliation.⁴ This is an expression of the need for solidarity in the face of aggression, which disregards ethnic or religious boundaries. It also evinces the fact that people belonging to various denominations share the same culture and interpret events through the same cultural code.

3. The identification of a culprit – whether symbolical or not – tends to isolate the polluting element from the social body, marking the first step towards the resolution of conflicts engendered by violence, the cleansing of the group and the restoration of order. The ritual examined here represents the very mechanism for intra-community equilibrium adjustment.

¹ Eleonora Sava, *Explorând un ritual*, 24.

² "A symbolical practice represents a process of constantly granting meaning to symbols in and through daily interactions" – Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Antropologie*, 43.

³ Vilmos Keszeg, "A Cseberbenézés...", 72.

⁴ Keszeg Vilmos, "Egy látomás. Az esemény, a reprezentáció és az ítékezés," 34–35.

4. The perpetrator identified within the ritual context is not necessarily the real culprit, but a symbolical offender, a *scapegoat*. This expression simultaneously designates the victim's innocence, collective polarisation against the victim, and the collective goal of such polarisation. In order to fulfil this role, the suspect must be vulnerable and must lack the support of the social body. In addition, the group must unanimously consider him guilty of something and regard him/her as a pariah, as a *persona non grata*. This means that action may be taken against the scapegoat, even in a violent manner. When the victim is symbolically classified as marginal, violence is considered to be legitimate. In the localities investigated, most of the reports concerning theft presented cases in which the culprit – real or symbolical – was a stranger to the village (marginality through exteriority), had recently arrived in the village (territorial marginality), or occupied a fragile social position, negatively connoted by the community (social marginality). This last category included addicts (alcoholics); the needy, who did not have sufficient land or livestock, and had to perform various jobs for the other villagers (the village shepherd, day-labourers or temporary employees); or those afflicted by psychic abnormality (for instance, kleptomaniacs).

Although not all these accounts refer to such thieves, the most commonly encountered narratives during this research outline a polarisation between identity and alterity: guilt is often assigned to the latter. Identity comprises most of the villagers; they are defined by a common space (they have been here for a long time, unlike those who have recently settled in the area); by a common past; and by kinship relations (closer or more distant). These elements configure a cultural identity, involving a common ethical and behavioural standard. Those who do not belong to this cultural “field” are likely to have violated the rules of conduct: they simply become prime theft or murder suspects. Drawing a typological outline of otherness throughout history, Helene Ahrweiler¹ shows that alterity may be confused with: a) ignoring the other (the one who is different in terms of ethnicity, religion, or skin colour); b) abnormality (the insane, the abnormal); c) a minority (underground movements) and deviance; d) barbarity (cultural otherness, oral societies); and e) alienation (slaves and the poor).

Corroborating this outline with the personal narratives recorded during field research, one may notice that the image of the thief largely overlaps with that of otherness. For several categories, such as the foreigner, the kleptomaniac, or the alcoholic, a prominent role is played by the perception of the person involved – an important issue in the field of social cognition. From this point of view, there is a certain standardisation of mentality concerning thieves and a recurrence of various stereotypes. “Clichés and stereotypes are statements and assessments that circulate in the individual's socio-cultural environment; they are usually adopted by the latter without being analysed critically.”² One may distinguish here several categories of individuals: foreigners or outsiders, the deviant (kleptomaniacs), and marginal individuals (alcoholics). They are opposed to the people who are integrated within the group. “An

¹ Ahrweiler, Helene, “Imaginea celuiilalt și mecanismele alterității” (The Image of the Other and the Mechanisms of Alterity), in *Introducere în istoria mentalităților colective* (Introduction in the History of Collective Mentalities), ed. Toader Nicoară (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1998), 210.

² Petru Iluț, *Iluzia localismului și localizarea iluziei. Teme actuale ale psihosociologiei* (The illusion of localism and the localization of illusion) (Iași: Polirom, 2000), 67.

integrated person identifies with the community and endorses its norms and values, supporting them against any foreign group or internal deviance. [...] A deviant individual will not comply with the common rules, but is guided by personal or borrowed standards. [...] A marginal individual is situated on the outskirts of the community and only sporadically participates in collective activities. Finally, a foreigner is outside the group [...], yet actively enters into contact with it.”¹

Some accounts collected during field research indicate an overlap between the image of the foreigner and that of wrongdoers in general. “They’re strangers to our village! They keep coming and putting us to shame. With evil things! They’re thieves, drunkards, scallywags, and tramps! ‘Cause we used to have a decent village, as the Lord is my witness! And now these wanton good-for-nothings are here!”² One may detect here the scheme of – the foreigner’s – social role; this represents role-related expectations, i.e. “a body of knowledge regarding the manner in which an individual who has a particular social role will behave (verbally and nonverbally).”³ In the interview excerpt quoted above, the interlocutor is certain that the foreigner will behave like a wrongdoer: “thieves, drunkards, scallywags, and tramps.” The personal narratives recorded in the field reflect a dense network of often tense social relations, which are woven by and around the performers of this ritual, as well as the mechanisms for generating such networks.

The culprit – whether real or symbolical – is sometimes not a stranger, but a relative or a friend. In most situations of this type, the conflict is settled through the reconciliation of the parties. Order is restored only when the one who is contested assumes guilt publicly and “redeems” himself or herself, returning the stolen goods, and possibly also finding other forms of compensation: covering the drink or food expenses of the injured party.

It is often the case that the narrative coagulated during and after the symbolical practice spreads throughout the village, but the victim does not take visible action. The victim does not openly accuse the suspect (who has meanwhile turned into a defendant) and does not alert the police, but simply declares that after the ritual, they feel “at peace” because they know who stole from them. Still, with the endorsement and support of the entire human group, the injured party resorts to various means of marginalising the culprit. If the latter is a stranger who is temporarily hired in the village, he will not be given any more work, being forced to leave the place and seek work elsewhere.

Sometimes, after performing the ritual, the victim’s family will resort to strategies of accusing and publicly shaming the offender, for example, by shouting on the road, “Hey you, the girls have seen you in the bucket!”⁴ or “Hey you, they’ve seen you in the bucket, you’re the one who stole from us!”⁵ In certain exemplary narratives, following the public accusations, the indicted individual will resort to self-punishment through exile. One text recounts how a man, who was suspected of stealing a horse and

¹ Ioan Radu, *Psihologie socială* (Social Psychology) (Cluj-Napoca: EXE SRL, 1994), 118.

² Field information, Dezmir, Cluj County, 23 July 2006, interviewees (M. S., 76, and R. D., 70).

³ Petru Iluț, *Iluzia localismului*, 70.

⁴ Field information, Sadu, Sibiu County, 27 September 2005 (interviewee E. P., 51).

⁵ Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee V. T., 78).

was threatened by the aggrieved owners, simply left his home and his family, and went into the wide world.¹

The personal narratives recorded during field research describe a range of punitive procedures, aimed at marginalising and shaming the culprit. The latter would often be isolated through silence: the villagers would no longer greet him or speak to him when they met.² At the opposite pole of silence, there was marginalisation through words: the culprit would be called “the Evil One,” his guilt becoming thus his alias (or nickname): Ion the Evil, or Ion Evil.³ At other times, he would be taken out of the house and walked by force through the locality, under circumstances suggesting social downgrading: for instance, he would be led through the village with the stolen goods and made to wear a moralising inscription: “That’s what awaits those who steal!”⁴ In some cases, there would be a public presentation of the act of justice, through theatrical forms, such as dancing: the culprit would have to dance in a Hora.⁵

These measures aimed to stigmatize perpetrators by exposing them to the social group, together with the *corpus delicti*, and discrediting them in a public or festive environment. Punishment had ethical, educational and psychological dimensions: its effect was to isolate the criminal from the social group, so that he would no longer repeat the wrongdoing. For the other members of the community, the punishment had the value of an exemplum: “That’s what awaits those who do what we’ve done!”

The status of each individual within the human group depended heavily on social relations and was conditional on the others’ opinions: “the village gossip.” In this context, being publicly *discredited* or berated, as well as no longer being greeted in the street were harsh sanctions, involving the culprit’s symbolical elimination (through words or silence) from the social body.

This kind of punishment was not restricted to the Romanian tradition alone: “The group’s opinion was often expressed by way of ridicule and ostracism. Before being punished, a recalcitrant individual was derided or avoided by his peers. Having to comply with such attitudes, expressed by family and community members, was, for this individual, a heavier punishment than being subjected to certain tortures.”⁶ Even today, public opinion and public humiliation may be sources of self-control.

In other cases, divine punishment was expected, out of the conviction that superhuman justice would work without fail and punish the offender in an exemplary manner. Illnesses, accidents, tragic deaths, and family rifts are commonly “translated” by traditional communities in terms of punishments that are imposed on culprits by the absolute legislator. Here are some examples collected during field research:

a.) God punishes thieves through family problems (tension, strife between family members): “Before, I never used to lock the doors, I would leave them open [...].

¹ Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee N. T.), 74.

² Field information, Sadu, Sibiu County, 27 September 2005 (interviewee I. L., 51).

³ Field information, Rodna Veche, Bistrița-Năsăud County.

⁴ Field information, Fundătura, Cluj County.

⁵ Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee V. T., 78).

⁶ Nicolae Petrescu, *Primitivii. Organizare-Instituții. Credințe-Mentalitate (The Primitives. Organisation-Institutions. Beliefs-Mentality)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2001), 212.

Once I had a wallet [...] And I [...] put a thousand lei in the closet, wrapped it in some coat. And it vanished [it was stolen]. My oh my, the money was gone! [...] Since then, I have never left the door unlocked. And they searched [in the basin] but they couldn't see his face, only his hands and the wallet in his hands and... no money, they didn't find the money. He was a neighbour from around here [the thief], and he didn't pay me back, he paid... millions... the many fights he was involved in and... all the scandal there was in their house. God punished him!"¹

b.) God punishes thieves through paralysis: "He could only walk with great difficulty, really great difficulty." According to popular belief, punishment for guilt will reverberate upon the culprit's entire family: "one brother [...] had an accident," "his mother died on the spot."²

"When there was a vineyard here, the man who worked there, at the vineyard, stole. You know there were many tractors and many machines there. There was a man guarding them. And he was the guard [...]. And a lot of his tools went missing. And now, the guard, they said he should pay for them! And he said that ... look, he would put an anathema on whoever stole them, that there were a whole lot of things that had got stolen and he simply couldn't pay for them! No, he wouldn't say. Then, he threw a few things back, but he had already... [the anathema] and it so happened that he went to see a brother of his, I don't know where, in the army, and he had an accident, the car wasn't even his, his mother died on the spot, and he remained a cripple for as long as he lived. He was no longer able to walk, except with great difficulty, really great difficulty. 'Cause I asked that man. He said all he knew was that the guy had used the dough to get a car."³

c.) God finds the guilty and punishes both them and their families, through death, injury, and illness: "God discloses the truth! It makes you shudder! But there are cases that do come true!"

"At Pianu de Sus there was another accident. A man had come to visit his sister in our village, in a cart driven by a horse. And was driving the cart back home. Now, it is true that he was drunk. And there were some people who were driving a car – there were three people: a - forester, a local police officer and the third one – a citizen. All three of them were friends. And they came – whatever they did – what happened was that they drove into that man's cart and killed him on the spot. They left him there and disappeared from the scene of the accident. The horse didn't die. And the horse carried the dead man back home. And I don't know where they were heading. 'Cause ... they were going somewhere, I can't really say where and how ... to some witches, to those people who read in ... and people said that there had been three people in the car, they had injured the man, but no one found out who they were. But they were soon to be discovered. The first to die was the forester – also from an accident: a horse-driven cart ran over him. The second one didn't get in trouble himself, but he was in the woods with a cart pulled by some oxen and I don't know how it happened but the cart started moving from up there and his wife, as she was standing in front, before the oxen,

¹ Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee V. T., 78).

² Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee V. T., 78).

³ Field information, Trittenii de Jos, Cluj County, 20 July 2006 (interviewee V. T., 78).

was slashed through by the cart rudder, it went right through her. And it was stuck inside her. His wife is still alive today, but she's in a wheelchair. So his wife was punished. But it also wasn't easy on him. He cast her out of the house, 'cause, well! She wasn't good for work any more and ... what can I say ... He was thirty something, he was young! And he brought another one and had a child with her. And now, my child's mother-in-law tells me, she says, "Listen, Nelu is dying!" I say, "What on earth is wrong with him?" And she says, "He got paralysed, he went mad, after that he got paralysed, he's in hospital, in a coma, he doesn't know anything any more. And the local police officer also got paralysed and for the past 12 years he's hardly been able to move his feet. So God punished them for killing that man and if only they'd said something about it! If only they'd taken him somewhere! They left him there and ... that's what I mean, God discloses the truth! It makes you shudder! But there are cases that do come true!"¹

5. Given the fact that the ritual has been updated, there is a symbolical transfer of certain ills or sins (theft, murder) affecting a family or a community onto an individual. As a consequence, the individual will be isolated or expelled from the area inhabited by the group, or punished by the divine, supra-human justice, in which the members of folk communities have never ceased to believe. The removal of the polluter, who is considered impure, leads to restoring both individual balance and intra-community order, ensuring the purification and solidarity of the social group.

Thus, the custom of bucket divination brings up to date a system for the expression of public opprobrium and for sanctioning deviant behaviour: through the manifestation of collective hostility, it aims at eliminating the (real or symbolic) culprit from the group. As a ritualized form of popular justice, seeking the restoration of moral and social order and the consolidation of intra-community life standards, traditional rights and appropriate conducts, bucket divination represents an elimination and purification rite, falling within the category of scapegoat rites.

A final observation concerns the central role that women play in the ritual of identifying and punishing the offender. The symbolical practices investigated here evince a gendered ritualistic specialisation, since they are almost exclusively initiated or enacted by women. Thus, they reveal the women's powerful status, in the sense that through all their undertakings, it is women who apply a (transcendent) law or hasten its enforcement. The field research indicates that women play an important role in regulating the intra-community social, moral, and psychological order, actively contributing to the moral cleansing of a wider social group than simply that of the family. Clearly, the ritual analysed here intersects with magical practices, especially disenchantment scenarios – in the case of love and disease – targeting comparable goals. Like the ritual of bucket divination, disenchantment is, in traditional Romanian culture, a predominantly feminine practice. Women's fundamental role in solving individual predicaments (through the ritual of disenchantment) and social crisis situations (through bucket divination) emerges quite clearly in the rural communities from Transylvania.

¹ Field information, Pianu de Jos, Alba County, 8 February 2007 (interviewee M. S., 72).