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The “*Old Castle*”. An *Ethnographic Fairy Tale*: Myth or Reality?¹

The *Ethnographic Fairy Tale* is a term which is used for the first time in accordance with other similar terms already used by Ethnography and Ethnology or Ethno-anthropology research: the Ethnographic film, the Ethnographic novel. All of them, can be comprehended as Art forms inspired by the relationship of the ethnographer or anthropologist, (or in our case of the ethnomusicologist) with their field. Such is the case of the Ethnographic Fairy Tale.

During field research it becomes obvious, that oral tradition is not a myth, nor a way of making a myth. It is an internal power which gives birth to experiences again and again, and recreates them without altering their basic core. In this way it makes them creative and embodies them repeatedly in society, so that they become a live continuum and at the same time a real historiography not concerned with scientific narration or exposition of events, but with their embodiment in the social context, thus becoming a continuum in a real sense: a “tradition”. Scholars coming into contact with it will be surprised when they realize how deeply it involves reality and as they come closer they are able to interpret and at the same time investigate historical and cultural continuums, some of them hidden in different forms of Art in the subtle way that only a culture that is fully alive and vibrant can offer.

In this way the Ethnographic fairytale is a way of “making” Oral tradition. It becomes true when the research locus and its people summon the researcher to participate in the mystery of their own beings (lives). It is thus also a live continuum, a proposal to participate again in oral tradition (sung or not) in the new social context. In this sense it is a real story.

Labourt Torla and Warnier (Labourt Torla-Warnier, 1993, 2003,419), refer to forms of presenting the results of Ethnographic research. Among the best –known (a Monography, an Article, an Ethnographic Diary) appear some others which by nature involve forms of Art: the Ethnographic Film, the Ethnographic Novel. All of them presuppose a negotiation between the researcher and his field as the data presented and the results themselves presuppose a basic choice between different views and dimensions of the respective culture. Additionally they are strongly related to the interpretation (though based on personal experience and communication) of a culture by a researcher. Participant observation, communication and personal involvement restrict the danger of misunderstandings but in the social network of a given culture individuals offer and negotiate their personal experiences because of shared necessities and responsibilities as well as because of their shared communications in their society. The better and stronger the relationship and communication of the

¹ This text is a paper presented in Shanghai in China in July 2013 in the framework of the 42nd ICTM World Conference 2013. For the purpose of this presentation the writer was granted with a Barbara Barnard Smith Travel Award. It was the first presentation of the new concept of *the Ethnographic Fairy Tale* as a new artistic ethnographic process.

researcher with his locus the more “realistic” the negotiation and interpretation will be.

Nonetheless the first group of presentations presupposes that the data and the justification of the respective interpretation will be the basis of the Ethnographic presentation. A second artistic level of communication with the data is expected in the second group of presentations of the results of Ethnographic research.

Apart from the embodiment of the culture, both forms of presentation (in the case of the ethnographic film or the Ethnographic novel) presuppose a second level of elaboration on the part of the ethnographer: the embodiment of the culture in a way that will become part of the personal experience of his life and will in this way produce “expressive creation”.

In fact, “expressive creation” is, part of the process of becoming an ethnographer. It continues a process that is part of being and becoming an insider.

It is also part of orality (Oral Tradition). Or is Orality a form of expressive creation in the community: it is a form of the elaboration of messages due to relationships in the community and their transmission in different forms (songs, rituals, dances, fairy tales, local oral history, stories), which produce a local culture. All the forms of local culture which make up oral tradition are part of an expressive creation which becomes true because of the experiences and communicative relationships between the members of the community and the different generations.

So what is the place of myth in this context?

In the corresponding bibliography Myth and History similarly involve reality or non-reality becoming this way a kind of “Mythistory” (Mc Neil, p.9)

“With a more rigorous and reflective epistemology, we might also attain a better historiographical balance between Truth, truths and mythThe result might best be called mythistory perhaps.....This does not mean that there is no difference between one mythistory and another. Some clearly are more adequate to the facts than others. Some embrace more time and space and make sense of a wider variety of human behavior than others. I actually believe that historians’ truths, like those of scientists’, evolve across the generations, so that versions of the Past acceptable today are superior in scope, range, and accuracy to versions available in earlier times. (McNeil, 1986,8-9).

There are also other views about Myth:
Myth can be both fake and misleading or not

Fake and Misleading (“On the one hand myths may mislead disastrously” Mc Neil, 6), or useful and functional (“These collective manifestations are of very great importance” op.cit.),

and they prove to be self-validating:

“but as I said at the beginning, one person’s truth is another’s myth and the fact that a group of people accepts a given version of the past does not make that version any truer for outsiders. Yet we cannot afford to reject collective flattering as silly, contemptible error. Myths are, after all, often self-validating. A nation or any other

human group that knows how to behave in crisis situations because it has inherited a heroic historiographical tradition that tells how ancestors resisted their enemies successfully is more likely to act together effectively than a group lacking such a tradition.” (Mc Neil 1986, p.6).

As a term, “Myth”, is used negatively (for example see the title of the article by Tonkin, “History and the myth of realism”).

or

positively by Samuel-Thompson for example: “Yet a myth is a fundamental component of human thought” (Samuel-Thompson p.4),

As they put it:

“Yet if we turn to almost any historical field, this persistent blindness to myth undeniably robs us of much of our power to understand and interpret the past” (Samuel-Thompson, op.cit. p.4-5).

What is then a Myth?

We might say that Myth is a cultural construction that transmits experiences and forms personalities in social context. It transmits but also emphasizes or points out definite dimensions of the past or of social life in order to fulfil a special purpose. In this sense it is not fake but absolutely real. This transmission is due to the personal involvement of the members of the community in community life. People experience their past and present realities and focus on special parts of them if they find it necessary. When they omit or transform parts of these realities there is a special social reason, a way to react to the future or to survive, so they perform a sort of transformation for special reasons: to survive, to give advice to younger generations, to transmit their past, to elaborate experiences as to make them bearable and useful for survival in the future and to commemorate past experiences and to embody them in society and the natural environment in this way making them reachable and creative thus making history and oral tradition.

As Samuel and Thompson put it:

It was a fundamental proposition of the 1987 Oxford conference that we must look at life stories in this light. They should be seen not as blurred experience, as disorderly masses of fragments, but as shaped accounts in which some incidents were dramatized, others contextualized, yet others passed over silence, through a process of narrative shaping in which both conscious and unconscious, myth and reality, played significant parts. But we need to go forward cautiously, for two reasons. The first is simple. We are arguing for the universality of myth as a constituent of human experience. It lies behind any historical evidence. Hence to identify the element of myth in oral sources is certainly not to say that we are working with memories of a false past. Furthermore, a high proportion of the rich detail in a typical life story remains objectively valid: sometimes demonstrably so, from other sources, and by extrapolation from such proven credibility sometimes the only good evidence we have from an undocumented, hidden world. But every life story is also potential for the subjective, and even the unconscious. We do not have to choose one or jettison the other. Oral memory offers a double validity in understanding the past in which, as still today, myth was embedded in real experience: both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception (introduction p.5-6).

Yet though Myth has been diminished it gradually gets back with a stronger respect in science:

“When we do encounter myth our first instinct, it seems, is to devalue it, to rob it of its mysteries, to bring it down to earth Aglo-Saxon Historians seem happiest at work puncturing legends, proving the modernity of much of what passes for old, showing the artificiality of myth and its manipulable, plastic character” (Samuel-Thompson p.4).

“Yet myth is a fundamental component of human thought.” (op.cit.p.4)

Myth is now understood as a fundamental part of our sources of the Past and a basic tool for its interpretation.

“Yet if we turn to almost any historical field, this persistent blindness to myth undeniably robs us of much of our power to understand and interpret the past” (op.cit. p.4-5).

In this way myth becomes a natural normal creative process for human beings. When its purpose is useful and ethical it becomes a reality for three reasons: because it continues the past, its purpose is socially beneficial, and it is creative and belongs to the people because it is part of them. It comes from them. In this case we can talk about a form of history which might be even more important than its conventional form: It is not an outside description but part of the lives of the people and whatever its transformation might be it comes because of experience and the embodiment of the past (in time and space and in society) (Samuel-Thompson (*The myths we live by* “It was a fundamental proposition . . . both growing from it and helping to form its perception” p.5-6 see in the text above).

While realistic history is dissolved and considered as organized myth, statements such as the following emphasize more and more the necessity of Myth reality in human life: “When we do encounter myth fundamental component of human thought” “Yet if we turn . . . to interpret the past (Samuel –Thompson, p.4-5) (see in the text above).

What happens when the ethnographer reaches a similar point? When he is summoned by experiences and the personal relationships with the people in the field? When he is called by the personal experience of whatever a culture consists of. When he finds that it is impossible for him to avoid creative experience to inspire new insights and initiatives which might elaborate and reform what he experiences as culture and life in the field? Is it possible then that this experience and elaboration will result in new creative experiences as a continuum of the creative cycle he experiences while participating in the community/ties?

Is the result of this process an Art? Or is it something new-an Ethnographic art probably because it is inspired by deliberate ethnographic participation.

What is then (in such a context) an ethnographic fairy tale?

Or actually why did an ethnographic fairy tale like “The Old Castle” for example come into being?

It can be called a “fairy tale” or not: It is inspired in the field, and as a plot it embodies other very “ordinary” plots of Fairy Tales and/or Medieval Poems, which means that it is very realistic but on the other hand it continues a reforming of experiences which belongs to the Mythical sphere. But just because it is part of personal participation like all Myths it involves reality in subtle ways which are not apparent but hidden like the hidden messages of Oral traditions and local cultures. Because it has been creatively elaborated on an experiential level. An experience becomes reality because it is enacted.

What was then the Old Castle?

A live “lieux de memoire”?? A lieux de memoire which is not invented by a Western civilization in order to defend its own inadequacies as Pierre Nora declares (Pierre Nora p.12 “Lieux de memoire ...has receded”). It is a lieux de memoire embodied in the lives of the people in this way alive in its own right.

It is a high rock in the centre of an upland plain next to a river close to the village of Messolongos. This rock was honored in a very special way by the women. They danced on it every year during the day of Saint John a very important festival in the old villages of Pindus and Western Macedonia in Greece as well as in mainland or island areas of Greece. Nonetheless it is a custom for Greeks and others in general to build their churches (as well as their ancient temples in antiquity), on hills and mountain peaks. This well-known custom is more interesting in the case of *Messolongos*.

This high rock does not seem to be a religious point though there is a small church of Saint Panteleimon a bit further. In fact it is an archaeological site². But without any archaeological knowledge the locals call it “*Old Castle*” “*Paliokastro*”. Similarly, they call “*Paliochoria*” (*Old villages*) the old villages whose destruction were the main reason for the creation of the modern villages. In all probability, the term “*Palio-kastro*” refers to a reality coming to the present day as an Oral story about something Old and important to the local people (maybe an Old structure on the Rock).

Indeed archaeological research has attested this locus as an archaeological site and on the foot of it was excavated another Wall protecting the construction. Actually the small river must have been a source of water for its inhabitants or its defenders.

The story about “*Paliokastro*” doesn’t finish here. The most important part of the relationship of the *Paliokastro* with the local people is the way it has been embodied in their ritual and communal activities. As mentioned before, each anniversary of Saint John the women of the surrounding area used to gather and climb up on the rock (or on the high slope exactly next to it), to dance ritual dances. As they came down they passed by the river which flows at the foot of the Rock and they sang a song which I realized later that it is a lament song in terms of text and melody. The exclamations at the end are also part of lament practices (see in Katsanevaki 2017) Women coming from many villages around the area gathered on this Rock or on the high slope next to it (the information was ambiguous regarding the exact point) to sing and dance. I had information for women coming from 10 villages. I suspect this might have been a witness to older marriage or kinship relationships of these villages

² About the archaeological locations and evidence about Paliokastro see in the work of Karamitrou-Mentesidis, 1999.

or simply their common origin from one and the same community dispersed in smaller communities. It is very probable that the Castle was an important locus as regards local history and the relationships of the local people. I attested the same habit of smaller female gatherings during religious festivals and especially on the Day of St. John on the 24th of June in two other cases: in the village of *Dragasia* at a higher level in the mountain of Pindus and in the village of *Nostimo* closer to the area of *Argos Orestikon* nearby.

It was this habit (which stopped after World War II because of the sufferings that these villages experienced during the Word War II and the Civil War) that inspired the idea to recreate it in a new way which would embody the songs in a new context.

The Fairy Tale embodied different dimensions of locality

- 1) Local Archaeology
- 2) Local History
- 3) Local people
- 4) Local Oral narratives
- 5) Local dialect
- 6) The relationships of the locals with neighboring local people or ethnic groups (Vlach speakers, and Gypsy instrumentalists)
- 7) Local songs in context
- 8) Local landscape and architecture and its justification in realistic history and myth.
- 9) The myth about the probable reason of the functionality of the place as a “lieux de memoire” in the local societies.

The ethnographic Fairy Tale as a “real” myth also participates in emotions summoned to the ethnographer by the emotional style of the locus of research.

As Middleton puts it: “Our emotions are historically shaped sociocultural constructions more than they are personal possession”

Middleton’s statement reflects a process (in the lives of people) which correspondingly reflects the process of abstraction of the ethnographer when his emotions are shaped by the sociocultural construction of the society he is involved with, participating in a process of accumulation of historical time in the field.

Middleton’s statement about the emotional style is characteristic in this context:

“The organization of our emotions bears the stamp of time and place. Emotional style connects individual experience with historical derived group cognitive and moral structures which, in turn, supply the meaning and motivation by which individuals enact and interpret style and self in daily lives. The concept of style reflects the formative and regulative role of culture in furnishing us with ordered emotional experiences. A culture, then, may be described in part by its characteristic organization of emotions” (Middleton 1989, p.188).

In fact emotional style as described by Middleton implies the historical and experiential perspective of culture in its creative human psychological expression which enacts creativity and gradually forms cultural expression. Myth and its expressions participate in this context.

The Ethnographic Fairy Tale then, the “Old Castle” or “Paliokastro” in Greek is nothing more than a realization of these emotional reflective and creative experiences between a space with its people and the researcher.

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