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Dincolo de Poveste:
The Identity of the Romanian and Moldovan
Folk Costume

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I declare that this Critical Cultures Research Project is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

A nation's textile history has the power to tell the story of its rich culture and the characteristics of the people that live there (Stanton, 2019). To reference an article that quotes Eric Minding, "Cloth is a language through which people can tell stories about themselves, their community, and their place in the universe" (2019, cited in Stanton, 2016, n.p.). This text will focus on traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk costumes and how they represent cultural identity. It will be written from the perspective of a woman who has strong cultural ties to her Moldovan heritage by way of her family, who were born in Moldova but have since moved to Ireland.

There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and history that can be decoded from what people wear. "Dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time" (Eicher, 1995, p. 1). The folk costume is a distinctive garment that expresses identity and it reflects how people viewed and interacted with their environment (Buzilă, 2011, pp.1–11). The Romanian and Moldovan folk costume was an old language that marked one's identity and created a sense of belonging for the wearer and their surrounding (Bâtca, 2006, p.5). The reason Romania and Moldova are being discussed in this text together is that the cultures of these two countries have an influence on each other as they both share a similar history, language, and cultural heritage (Caľus, n.d., p. 8).

This discussion will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will begin with the subject of embroidery that is featured on traditional costumes. As in Romania and Moldova, each village had its own unique style of embroidery embellished onto its clothing (Paine and Paine, 2010, p.78-92). The second chapter will focus on folk costumes and how each region had their own unique style of dress. The elements featured in both women's and men's costumes will also be examined within the chapter. Lastly, the final

chapter will be based on the costume's relationship with the modern era. The relationship of the folk costume with industrialization and technology will be mentioned alongside the subject of preservation being brought up. There are museums and conservators that exist that are working hard in order to protect traditional garments and tell the story of the people that came before us. An example is the Romanian conservator, Florica Zaharia who will be discussed later in this chapter. The last section of this chapter will feature young Romanian fashion designers Alexandra Sipa, Lana Dumitru and Andra Citan. These young designers are creating exceptional contemporary pieces of work that are all influenced by traditional Romanian and Moldovan culture. They are creating a new way of representing cultural identity that fits in with the present era. Lidiya Todieva from Moldova will also be mentioned in this discussion, she is a designer who is repurposing old traditional costumes. In this way, Todieva is pushing the narrative of making traditional costumes popular again and preserving these costumes in order to continue telling the story of our past.



Fig. 1, Adolph Chevallier (1920), Bistria Valley, Carpathian Mountains of Moldavia.

Chapter 1

The Language of Embroidery



Fig. 2 AIEVEA Collection, Embroidered Traditional Shirt from Transylvania, National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

Embroidery is the practice of adorning fabrics with a needle and thread, and it has an important role in Romanian and Moldovan traditional clothing (D.Lowe et al., 2008, p.119). The embroidery on these objects is presented in linear, abstract, and geometrical motifs. In rural areas of Romania and Moldova, people were using this discipline to create a story that was their own and one they identified with (Deliu,2022). It was used to represent people from isolated areas where identities were found to be more separated (2022). The embellishments created with embroidery represented a beautiful visual narrative, they were original and unique. The embellishments were seen as a visual language that reflected cultural beliefs, folklore, status, history, politics, and other meaningful ideas (Kaya, Sînziana and Romanescu, 2021a).

In Romania and Moldova, each region had its own unique motifs that defined the people from specific areas, it was unacceptable to copy the decorative symbols from someone

else's individual traditional dress (2021a). These patterns were known by the creator, consumer, people that were in the same social group, and also different groups that lived in the same area (Stoica and Doagă, 1977, p.7). In the nineteenth century, the materials used that were sewn into were hemp, linen, and cotton; in the twentieth century, more artificial and synthetic fabrics came into use (Chițan, 1982, p. 8). They were usually white and used as a canvas to embroider on (2022). The motifs are colourful, distinct, and simple yet effective. The positioning and colours of the motifs were critical, and this is what distinguishes and identifies them as Romanian and Moldovan ornamentation (2021a).

The main colours that were used in embroidery were black, red, white, and blue (2022). Depending on the time period, the colours that were used were what was available and accessible (2022). At a later time when industrial dyes were accessible more colours were introduced, for example, green, purple and yellow (2021a). The colours were combined to look aesthetically pleasing (2021a). They are carefully picked so they can harmonise, have rhythm, and evoke feelings and thoughts from the work (Doncean, 2015).



Fig. 3 Ensemble Collection, Romanian Blouse, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The motifs were placed in areas that were most visible to the eye, such as the shoulders, chest, and arms (2022). This was on purpose to “show off” and be seen by others (2022). There are also theories that come from mythological ideologies that are worth mentioning. For example, it was believed that the designs were used as a tool to protect the body from danger (Patricia Rieff Anawalt, 2007, pp.100-123). The embroidery would be placed near the edges of the garment, such as the hem, sleeves, cuffs, and buttonholes (2007, pp.100-123). These places on the garment were known to be vulnerable areas, which is why they were covered with embroidery (2007, pp.100-123). Other vulnerable placements are the front of the body, shoulders, sleeves, sexual areas, above the heart, and centre back (2007, pp.100-123). In the region of Hunedoara, Romania most of the sleeve is covered in embroidery (2010, pp. 78-92). The people from the Pădureni region in Romania wore blouses that are rich with embroidery (Fig.4) (2022).



Fig. 4 Embroidered Blouse from the Padureni Region, Romania.

The most common stitches used were running, double, satin, cross, chain, square chain, closed herringbone, insertion stitches and gold work (Panaite, 2020.). Cross stitch is one of the oldest and most popular stitches used worldwide to create an image or design (2008, p.120). Traditionally the embroidery was sewn with cotton and viscose embroidery threads, in more modern times various threads were introduced such as silk, wool, and linen (2020). Beads, metallic threads and sequins also adorned Romanian shirts (2020). Metal thread work was a frequent use of stitches found on aprons and shifts in the historical areas of Banat and Wallachia (2010, pp. 78-92).

Symbolism

“Folk costumes and art, in general, are like a book, a book from which one can learn the most complex data about the life of a human community, provided that the student seeks to decipher its language and decode it for the sake of the future generations” (1974, cited in Doncean,2015) Folk symbols have been translated from generation to generation for thousands of years, they are powerful and expressive communication tools (2007, pp.100-123). Romanian and Moldovan costumes were decorated with symbols. “The human mind is equipped to think and communicate with symbols, and the language of symbols and especially archetypes transcend time and space” (2021a). They trigger and evoke our intellect, emotions, and spirit (Fontana, 2003, p. 7). As humans, the way we communicate is dependent on signs in the form of writing, spoken words, images, or gestures (2003, p. 7). Symbols are what represent our reality, the environment, objects and actions that are around us (2003, p.7). From a mythological point of view, symbols can also be connected with us in a spiritual way that represents our deep intuition (2003, p.7).



Fig. 5 AIVEA Collection, Embroidered Traditional Shirt from Moldavia, ASTRA Museum

Many of the symbols featured in the folk costume are inspired by nature, as agriculture is a huge part of Romanian and Moldovan culture. The majority of the population of the two countries lived in rural areas (2022). These symbols were relatable and

represented people living in rural areas. The narrative that was created by using symbols provided people with a sense of belonging (2021a). They are adorned with leaves, birds, flowers, fruits and other symbols (Stănescu-Bătrînescu, 1978, p.5). It is visible the amount of work and thought that goes into the colours, patterns, and positioning of each adornment. The personality of the creator is exposed through decoration. My own grandmother, from Lapushna in Moldova, embroidered beautiful patterns onto the tablecloths, wall carpets and clothes she handmade (Fig. 6,7). She did not know how to read or write; however, she was able to express herself through her craft. Although I did not know her very well, I feel like I know a lot about her through her patterns and the kinds of colours she used, which create a beautiful visual narrative.



Fig. 6, 7. Scanned Images I Have Taken of My Grandmother's Embroidery,
Maria Sirbu

There are two main categories that exist in the symbolism of motifs: a) shape and style, and b) the theme of the ornamentation (1978, p. 5). The motifs are labelled into two categories of patterns: geometric and non-geometric, or also known as freehand-drawn patterns (1978, p.5). Both are inspired by the environment that is around the creator (1978, p. 5). The order of the symbols is important (Cirlot, 1971, p. 52). They are placed under the order of space, geometric forms, numbers, and living beings as symbols in locations that are defined by the "law of correspondences" and other symbolic representations (1971, p. 52).

In "*Broderia românească aplicată*" and "*Cusături populare din Moldova*", the authors explain that depending on the content, the motifs are then separated into three groups: abstract, realistic, and symbolic symbols (1978, p. 5; 1982, p. 3). The stylized patterns are found on more old-fashioned costumes while realistic symbols are found on more modern versions of the costume (1982, p. 4). All symbols from different shapes and categories are then combined into a single motif to create a narrative (1978, p. 6).

The abstract group of symbols is the most common pattern that is found in most areas of the regions (1978, p. 6). They come in points, lines, and geometric shapes, for example,

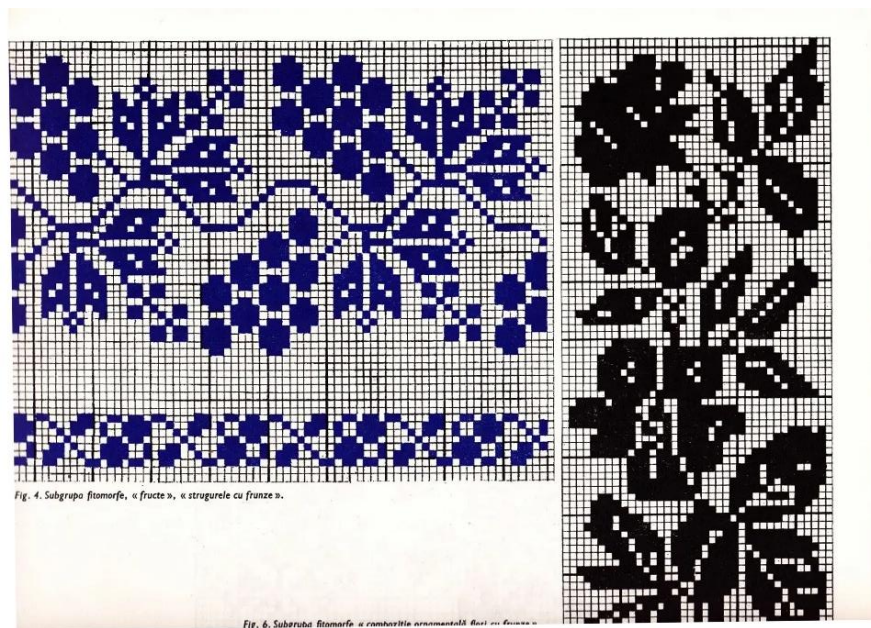


Fig. 8 Example of Motifs in the Physiographic Group.

a square (1982, p. 4). The realistic styles of motifs are further separated into three subgroups physiographic, skeuomorph, and community (1978, p. 6). Within the physiographic groups, there exist the subgroups of phytomorphic, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic (1978, p.6). These are symbols that are commonly used, unlike the other subgroups (1978, p. 6). The category of physiographic ornaments is represented by flowers, leaves, vines, and fruits (ear of wheat, acorn, blueberry, grape, apple, etc) (Fig.6) (1978, p. 6). All of these symbols come in geometric and non-geometric forms (1978, p. 8). The number of petals in the flowers is different depending on the region, some regions include four and others include six or eight changing the style of the flower (1978, p. 6). In Northern Moldova specifically, the flowers appear in broken lines and the tree of life is also included (1982, p. 4).

The zoomorphic elements include rams' horns, sparrows, pigeons, and hens (1978, p. 9). The anthropomorphic and skeuomorphic groups of embroidery fall into the symbolism category, which can include images that are mythological or religious (1978, p. 9-11;

1982 p. 5). In the anthropomorphic group, you can find symbols that resemble human characteristics, for example, the silhouette of a woman's figure or an eye (1982, p. 5). In Eastern European embroidery, it is noted that the silhouette of a woman is to represent "an ancient fertility goddess" (2007, p. 108). It can be embroidered alongside the zoomorphic group of patterns for instance birds, deer, etc (2007, p. 108). She is shown to appear with a blank face and can be stylised in a geometric and non-geometric form (2007, p. 108). According to Cirlot, the figure of a goddess represents agriculture (1971, p.62). The fertility of the goddess symbol and the tree of life can be shown together in the same composition (2007, p. 109). This is a portrayal of strength and long life, similar to all tree elements (1971, p.294). It has a universal meaning (1971, p.294). This kind of symbol is found in more isolated regions such as the Carpathian Mountains (2007, p, 109). The tree of life is a popular symbol not only in Romania and Moldovan embroidery but also found in other cultures around the world (2010, p. 142). The tree of life can be paired with floral elements, for instance, the carnation, tulip, and rose, or with plants ascending from a vase (2007, p. 110).

The skeuomorphic groups have symbols that are inspired by man-made objects, more specifically working tools for example a pitchfork, rake etc (1978, p. 9). The symbols found in this group can portray the kind of occupation and social conditions the people of the region or creator were under (1978, p. 11). The meaningful embroidery motifs are passed from generation to generation and their definition is shaped over time (2021a).

Chapter 2

Folk Costume

Clothing can construct our identity socially and culturally, it is an artefact of spiritual and material culture, it is a language expressing an artistic message shaped by economic, social, moral, and aesthetic transformations (Akdemir, 2018;2015). Similar to embroidery and symbols, clothing is a tool that is used to communicate identity (Motta and Biagini, 2017, p. 11). In prehistoric societies, people used signs to reflect their social, sexual and racial status (2017, p. 11). Through dress, we can see how people express themselves, the way they behave, and all the elements that create their identity (2017, p. 11). Romanian and Moldovan traditional costumes are very emblematic and have deep roots in the history of the aesthetics of the two countries (Cantemir,1971, p.7). The folk costume has been influenced by periodic groups such as the Thracians, Gaetes, and Dacians (2015). The costume has not changed since Thracian times; its beauty and tradition have been preserved by many generations (1971, p.7).

Similar to the embroidery, the traditional costumes worn in rural areas are different in each region and have their own identity (Mocenco et al., 2013). For example, in the area of Gorj, Romania, the costumes are known to have the most alluring decorative patterns (2013). Different communities identified themselves with traditional costumes (Buzilă, 2011, pp.12). It is a part of a world that no longer exists or translates into contemporary times (Kaya and Romanescu, 2021b). The traditional costume in the historic region of Moldavia displays the quality of craftsmanship and the beauty of ancient tradition (2015). In Bucovina, Romania you can find that the costumes convey the artistry of the making of folk costume that is crafted by women (Fig. 9,10) (2015). In the north of Moldova, the costumes are presented in a utilitarian structure, which differs from the costume worn in Oltenia and Munteni, Romania (Petrescu, 1959, p.2). Maramureş, Romania costume has

elements of sobriety and beauty, and has kept its traditional style even in the face of modernism (2015). The costume features the colours red, black, yellow and blue (2015). The costume from Transylvania, Romania is more conventional and functional (2015). Banat, Romania is a historical region, and in this area there were unique costumes that you could not find elsewhere (2015). In each area, the traditional dress represented a community who were telling their stories through cloth.



Fig. 9,10 Men and Women's Folk Costume, from The Historic Region of Bucovina, Romania

Clothing is an instrument of communication that has placed people's identities within the social hierarchy (2011, p. 170). It has two responsibilities: it can act as a language and as a "vestimental system," where the object of clothing can signify our place in the world (1983, cited in Akedemir, 2018). During the holidays, individuals would wear their best clothes and display their wealth to the community (2011, pp.170). Holiday costumes would include more elements than costumes that were worn on a daily basis (2022). These were the costumes that people would wear with the intention of wanting to be recognised and to flaunt (2022). Dress has an important role in constructing our identity to the outside world and also our own perception of ourselves (2008, p.10).

Women's Costume



Fig. 11 Traditional Women's Costume, Historic Region of Vlasca, Romania.



Fig.12 Ensemble Collection, 19th Century Traditional Women's Costume, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig.13 Young Girl from the Historic Region of Tara Oasului, Romania

The main elements of traditional Romanian and Moldovan women's costumes consist of a shirt (cămașă), skirt (fustă), apron (catrinta), narrow belt (curea) and leather vest (vesta de piele) (2015). It also includes an embroidered blouse (bluza brodata) and a head scarf (broada) ('Ensemble', 1972). The women's costume differentiated from the men's as it was decorated with more embroidery, was more complex, and featured more elements; the women's hair also had an influence on their costume too (2022). In Moldova and other European countries, a woman's hair was seen as "great power" (Sontu, 2013, p. 59).

The craft of making these costumes was taught by women in the villages; this knowledge was passed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter (Cîmpeanu, 2020). It is said that there was an Orthodox prayer associated with the making of clothes "Cămara Ta Mântuitorule, o văd împodobită. Și îmbrăcămintea nu am ca să intru într-însa. Luminează-mi haina – taina sufletului meu!" (2020). This translates to "Your pantry,

Saviour, I see adorned. And I don't have clothes to go into it. Illuminate my garment - the secret of my soul! And save me, my Savior” (2020). Constructing clothes was not just a



Fig.14 AIEVEA Collection, Traditional Women's Blouse from Transylvania, Romania, National Museum of the Romanian Peasant.

hobby to these women, it was a spiritual experience.

“The folk costume was the secret of the womans soul and the glory of the whole family” (2020). In

the ‘Subversive Stitch,’ the author includes a poem by G. Ciotti, in the verse he includes a line,

“Womens strength is unequal to the strenuous toil

by which men show their wit, but with needle, in

silk, and gold their white hands may reveal their

own sharp and pregnant wit” (Parker, 2010, pp.60–

64).

The blouse/shirt, “bluza”, comes from Dacian influences specifically in the regions found around the Carpathian Mountains and from the North of Moldova to the Mehedinți (2015). The blouse was heavily decorated with embroidery that had geometric, floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic patterns (2015). This kind of tailoring of the shirt is considered to be the oldest style (1980, p.15). This Moldovan shirt is defined by its resources, the ornamentation is “simply și de bun gust” which translates to “simple and tasteful” (1980, p.15). There are two types of ‘cămași’ that are found in the Botoșani region, one is a straight or loose shirt that is wrinkled at the neck, that was worn more in the west of the area in the Siret Valley (1980, p.13). The other shirt has a more uniform style and is more known as ‘the straight shirt’ (1980, p.13). In the area of Transylvania and Banat, the shirt has gone through many transformations over the years (1959, p.10). The oldest version of the shirt has lapels attached to it and is part of the women’s traditional dress (1959, p.10). There are two parts to this shirt, the

first part is the upper part also known as ‘briu’ and the second part is the lower part known as ‘poale’ (1959, p.10).

The ‘catrinta’ is an important part of the Moldovan costume (1980, p.17). It is created in the form of a rectangle and is worn from the waist down in front of the skirt which also may include ornamentation (1980, p.17). It is made by the process of weaving and is woven in “two or four stands of wool” (1980, p.17) (2013, p. 75). The ‘catrinta’ is also worn in the areas along the banks of the Prut River, which is a river that runs through Romanias border with Moldova and Ukraine, and other areas of Romania (2013, p. 75).

The covering of the head was more symbolic in the past than it is today (Petrescu, 1959, p.10). In the Botoşani region of Romania, women who were not married wore their heads uncovered, and women who were married had their heads covered with a headscarf (Paveluic-Olariu, 1980, p. 11). It was the norm for a lot of Orthodox women from Romania and Moldova to have their heads covered permanently when they get married (Zăhăleanu, 2017). In present times, older women, specifically from rural areas, still wear a head covering. Whenever I visit my grandmother in Moldova, she always wears a cover on her head as it “is a sign of modesty and keeping up tradition” (2017).

Men's Costume



Fig. 15 Traditional Men's Costume from Suceava, Historic Region of Bukovina.



Fig. 16, 17 Traditional Men's Costume from the Historic Region of Tara Oasului, Romania.

As stated before, what the men wore all depended on what region they were from. The men's costume is much simpler than the women's costume although it still had Dacian influences (2020;1980, p. 21). The man's costume included a hat (pălărie), shirt (cămașă), a leather vest (bundiță), wide girdle (chimir), and trousers (pantaloni) (2015, p.2). Unlike the female costume, the man's costume has undergone little change over the last few decades (Bâtca,2006, p.64). It was more conservative, has a more "sober" colour palette, and was more functional (2006, p. 64). It was adapted to the environment around the wearer (2006, p.64). The costume is decorated with much less ornamentation and a small number of stripes (2015, p. 2).

The hats that the men wore depended on the geographical area where the man lived and what resources and materials were available to make the hats (2006, p.64). During the summertime, the men wore felt hats that had round caps and large brims in the area of Botoșani (1980 p. 21). The elder man usually wore hats with larger brims, it was usually

worn in colder weather (1980, p. 21;2015, p.2). In Moldova, the other kind of hat worn



Fig. 18 Traditional Romanian Men's Costume.

by men were straw hats to protect themselves from the hot weather (2011, p. 37). This was also worn in areas in Romania, where the straw hats were either made in the household or by craftsmen that worked in workshops (2006, p. 64). These hats were more common and made in village areas, where they were worn by all ages (2011, p. 37). In Iarna, Romania men wore hats made of black lambskin and black hats were worn during holiday celebrations (1980, p. 21).

Similar to women, mens hair also had meaning and an influence on their costume (2006, p.64). Romanian men wore their hair short in the historic area of Tara Hațegului, and the poorer men wore their hair in two long braided buns (1980, p. 21). The wealthier men from the area of Tara Hațegului wore hats made from black lamb fur to distinguish themselves from the "peasant men" (1980, p. 81). In Manta, a village in Moldova, men wore postman hats that were decorated with homemade flowers (2006, p.64). During holiday celebrations the men decorated their hats with red flowers and peacock feathers (2006, p. 64).

The embroidery on a man's shirt (cămașă) was found on the collar, shoulders, front and back of the shirt, and the cuffs (2015, p.2). "Cămașa dreaptă", or "straight shirt" is the oldest style of traditional clothing and was worn by men both in their daily lives while working, and on holidays (1980, p. 22). It was easy and functional to wear (1980, p.22). Another name for it is "cămașa bătrânească", which means old man's shirt (2006, p. 66). It was in the same style and cut as the women's traditional shirt (2006, p. 66). Cămașa cu barbur (bearded shirt), Cămașa lungă cu clini laterali (long shirt with side gussets),

Cămaşa scurtă (short shirt), Cămaşa scurtă cu fustanelă (short shirt with skirt) and Cămaşa cu placă (shirt with placket) are other names for different shirt styles (2006, p.67). It was an essential piece for a traditional man's costume; young boys would wear a longer version with a rope or woollen belt tied around their waist, similar to the little girl's costume (2011, p.43). Around the mountainous areas of Romania, men would wear long shirts that went down to their knees; in lower plain areas, the shirts were even longer (2006, p.66). In Moldova, the colour of the embroidery would be in two or three contrasting colours (2011, p. 43). For special moments in a man's life, for example, marriage, or coming home from the army, women would embroider their shirts using white silk thread (used in the North and in Bucovina, Romania) or borangic, which is homemade silk thread (found in the South) (2011, p. 44).

Depending on the climate and time of year, mens trousers (pantaloni) came in a variety of styles (2006, p.68). Îțarii, Izmenele and Gacii are the names of the different styles of trousers that were worn (2006, 68). The men had to be cautious of the kind of trousers they had to wear; they had to be conscious of the climate and also of their functionality, so it did not affect their work (1980, p. 44). The trousers would be homemade and made from a special white fabric (2015, p.2). They usually had long seams and were tucked into their shoes or left on top. In the winter months, men wore woven foot wraps "bernevici" also known as "cioareci" to keep warm (2015, p.2).

As years passed, the appearance of traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk costumes began to change. Younger people in society started to adapt to the changing times and started to abandon the traditional costume (2011, p. 14). The older generation continued to wear the traditional dress and hold on to their identity which was being affected due to society evolving (2011, p.14). The folk costume went from an essential garment that was worn every day to a garment that is now worn on holidays and celebrations (2015).

Chapter 3

The Evolution of Folk Costumes

The traditional folk costume has gone through three stages of modification throughout history, according to specialists (2021a). In the first stage, traditional clothes were individual and had an association with a specific region (2021a). The second stage was the expansion of industrial development (2021a). Lastly, the third and final stage was the replacement of folk costumes with more modern clothing (2021a). The traditional clothing in the nineteenth century became a mirror of what society has become (2007, p. 101). It “reflected the conservative nature of the pre-industrial rural world” (2007, p. 101).



Fig. 19 Example of a Store-Bought Folk Costume.

The introduction of industrialisation and technology brought about the issue of mass production of traditional costumes and other household textiles (2022). Unfortunately, this took away the individuality of rural clothing, and there was a loss of identity and a sense of disconnection between the rural communities (2022). This began a decline in clothes created at home, and more people started buying clothes from shops and markets as it was quicker and easier (Iuga, 2016). In the twentieth century due to changes in society, people were pushed into wearing more modern clothing and traditional clothing was left behind as people adapted to this new contemporary world (Şofranschi, 2016). Handmade crafts, unique embellishments, and an embroidered language that was only known to locals were all lost during this new epoch (2016). Everything that was machine-made had no connection to any region (2022). Something that was once personal and cherished was now lost. Not

only did it create a detachment, but there were also parts of the costume that were replaced by other modern elements. Materials that were previously used to create the costumes such as hemp and linen, were replaced with industrially made fabrics (2015). Sheepskin coats were replaced with coats made industrially and foot wraps were replaced with shoes, boots and brogues (2015). In some areas where women wore a white marama, a headscarf made with delicate materials was replaced by a naframa (headscarf) (2021a).

However, there have been attempts to rejuvenate the traditional costume (2011, p. 16). In the twentieth century, there was an updated costume made in Moldova to represent its



Fig.20 Joc National Dance Company, Republic of Moldova, Ion Chibzii, the 1980s

cultural identity (2011, p.16). The Production Sector of the Ministry of Culture created contemporary costumes for professional dancers (2011, p.16). They took all the features and colours of the original traditional costumes and used these to exaggerate them in a contemporary way, but also in a style where the traditional elements are evident (2011, p.16). A similar case occurred in Romania as a result of industrialization during the period of the duration of communism (Kõiva and Kuperjanov, p. 2016). In areas where

festivals would be held in different areas featuring local folklore and traditional performances (2016). The performers would be wearing traditional garments in order to promote cultural identity (2016). There was an initiative to homogenise the performer's traditional costumes, and every traditional dance group was expected to be dressed in the same clothing (2016). This had impacted different towns as there had been a change in regional traditional costumes (2016). People had begun to purchase traditional clothing similar to the performer's costumes that they had seen at festivals (2016). The traditional costume has now become a national dress, it now represents the country instead of the individual (Eicher, 1995, p.303).

The Preservation of Folk Costumes

In the last few decades, as people seek authenticity there has been interest shown in traditional clothing (2011, p.12). As a result of the fall of the communist regime, there have been efforts gone into preserving the traditional folk costume, especially in museums in Moldova and Romania (2022).

Florica Zaharia is a textile conservator and curator from Romania (Coman Ernstoff, n.d.). She has worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and has coordinated the museum exchange programme with Romanian museums (n.d.). This gave people who worked in the Romanian museums opportunities to access the Metropolitan Museum of Art collections and introduced American faculties to Romanian heritage (n.d.). After twenty-eight years of working at the 'MET', Florica Zaharia opened up the 'Muzeul Textileor' in Băița, Hunedoara, Romania along with her husband Romulus Nicolae Zaharia and their daughter Ana Teodora Dragus (The Costume Rag, 2018). There is also one other museum located in Băița and in Hărtăgani all in Hunedoara County in Romania (Muzeul Textilelor, n.d.). The museum received a

donation from the costume institute of the MET of 1,871 costumes, accessories and textiles (2018). The museum pays great attention to the details and features of textiles, it is believed to be the only kind of collection of this kind in Europe (n.d.). Having had the privilege of speaking with Florica Zaharia through a Zoom meeting, I have asked her questions about information about traditional Romanian and Moldovan textiles. She mentioned ways that we can continue preserving these precious textiles. For example, have them placed properly, have them in the right setting and environment and have a better installation system (2022). She also mentioned that previously these objects were not looked at as the works of art that they are (2022). However, Moldova, Romania, and the rest of Eastern Europe are gradually beginning to view these important objects as works of art.



Fig. 21, 22 Muzeul Textilelor Collections, 19th Century Macedonian Vest, from the Historic Region of Dobrogea, Romania.

In Maramureș, Romania there have been strong developments made in the preservation of local traditional clothing (2016). In 2004, two museums opened in the area where they had done research on the preservation of traditional local textiles (2016). In small villages located in Maramureș and Bukovina, you can still find people wearing traditional costumes as their everyday attire, ‘portul nostra’, ‘our costume’ is what they call it, and it is one of the few traditional costumes still worn in Europe (Legrand, 2012, pp.197-208). Traditional techniques are also still used to make clothes, such as, felting (2012, p. 210). The felted wool that is created is used in the Wintertime to make coats (suman) and gilets (pieptar) for both men and women (2012, p.210). Specifically, isolated areas located in the Carpathian Mountains are where women are practising old traditional skills, in

particular, “planting, harvesting, shearing, spinning, carding, dyeing, and weaving flax and wool on home looms” (2007, p. 112).

In Moldova to promote cultural identity there are traditional festivals that take place. ‘IA Mania’ founded in 2013, is an example of a festival that supports traditional hand-embroidered blouses and the craftsmen that continue to create this traditional garment in the present day (IA Mania, n.d.). It takes place on the banks of the Nistru River (n.d.). Chefs, dancers, musicians and craftsmen that advocate traditional Moldovan identity are all assembled to promote their craft (n.d.). The festival holds different contests for young designers and artists who present their work or collections that are influenced by traditions (n.d.).

The Influence on Romanian and Moldovan Fashion Designers

Today fashion designers are continuously inspired by the traditional aesthetic of Romanian and Moldovan costumes. Designers from Romania and Moldova are taking elements from traditional costumes, such as the techniques, motifs, and use of vibrant colours, and are designing their own version of garments in a contemporary way. As a result, designers are exhibiting new ways of representing cultural identity.

Alexandra Sipa is an example of a Romanian designer who uses Romanian cultural components in her garments (Satenstein, 2020). Her designs have been featured in major magazine publications such as Vogue, Vanity Fair, Dazed China and Elle Romania. She grew up in Bacau, Romania, where a lot of the culture feeds into her work (2020). The colour palette is inspired by the clothes Romanian women wear in the city, prints on Romanian beach towels of women wearing bikinis, and she also uses lace techniques inspired by her grandmother’s tablecloths (2020). Sipa uses recycled wires in her collection to create her garments; she sourced them from a recycling centre in London, England (Hahn,2020). She explains that in Bacau it is unusual for people to throw items

away, ordinary objects are treated as any other (2020). What also served her inspiration for her collection is her grandmother's house, she describes it as "full of bright colours, mixed patterns with doilies and lace" (2020). She included other second-hand materials that she had found in charity shops in Bacau such as beach towels (2020). It was mentioned in an article that "the designer hopes to capture the "contrast between heightened austerity and extreme femininity" that she has observed in her native Romania" (2020). When looking for inspiration for her work, she says that she has researched different Romanian aesthetics (2020). Looking at her grandmother's home first and then moves on to study markets and neighbourhoods in Bucharest, Romania, while also trying to incorporate her own style (2020).



Fig. 23,24,24 'Romanian Camouflage' Collection, Alexandra Sipa,2020.

Lana Dumitru is another Romanian designer who uses modern techniques to express traditional patterns in her collections. The designer uses technology to pixelate and transform traditional patterns into a modernised print (Satenstein, 2012). This is visible in her collection titled "Romanian Apparel" (2012). 'Foræva' is a sculptural dress designed by Lana Dumitru and Vlad Tenu (Lana Dumitru, n.d.). It was influenced by the traditional folk patterns from Romanian rugs (n.d.). It was created through technology by

using 3D simulations, algorithmic design methods and digital prototyping (n.d.). As the two designers were approached by Swarovski, the dress itself is made from 25,000 Swarovski crystals (n.d.). The concept came from the idea of taking something from the past and putting it into the future in the shape of a dress (n.d.). The message the designers wanted to express is that “identity and tradition will not be lost on the path of inter-globalisation, they will evolve in unexpected ways, shaped by technology and emotions” (n.d.).



Fig. 25, 27 'To Eve' Collection, Lana Dumitru, 2010.

Fig. 26 'Foraeva', Lana Dumitru, Vlad Tenu, 2017.

In 2016 designer Andra Clitan founded a brand named ‘MA RA MI’ (MA RA MI, n.d.). The concept of the brand is to preserve traditional Romanian crafts and costumes along with other cultures around the world (n.d.). Clitan worked with French designer Philippe Guilet along with fifty other Romanian artisans on his couture collection, “100% RO PREJUDICES”, inspired by Romanian heritage (Andra Clitan, n.d.). Her role in this project was to advise the designer on traditional Romanian art and craft (Clitan, 2016). The collection consisted of 31 pieces all inspired by traditional Romanian crafts, costumes, traditions, materials, and the designers own experience of life in Romania (2021). This collection was a part of a project with ‘The Association 100%RO, as a means

of promoting and defining Romanian cultural identity in a positive light and exhibiting the beautiful traditional craft to the world (n.d.).

Lidiya Todieva is a designer from the Gagauzia region of Moldova (Gagauzia Dialogue, 2021) . She repurposes traditional Gagauz costumes and gives them a new life so they can become fashionable again (2021). She studied in the Garment Technologist Department at the Polytechnic College in Ryshkanovka; at the time, it was the Chisinau Polytechnic College (2021). Todieva has clients that often bring old traditional costumes that she restores by using modern techniques but also still following traditional tailoring (2021). The motivation behind Todievas work is to make more effort on reinstating our cultural identity (2021). She explains in an article that we are losing our identity and people all over the world are starting to look the same (2021). What is important to her is to carry on that history and tradition and to have heirlooms to pass on to our children, in this way they can learn about their history and ancestors (2021).

Conclusion

As expressed, traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk costumes represent cultural identity through and through. Embroidery was used as a language to tell the story of the creator and the wearer. A visual narrative of people from the past was told through symbolism, colour, and patterns. The clothing itself marked the identity of the creator, the wearer's place in the world, and how others viewed them. All of these elements combined expressed a person's relationship with themselves and their environment. The connections people had with their habitat were special and spiritual. Each area had its own characteristics, fostering a sense of community among rural residents. Clothing gave people a sense of belonging in areas that were so isolated from the rest of the country.

Unfortunately, as times have changed, the language that was used to express traditional folk costumes is something that cannot be translated today (2021). It can only be understood that the concept behind the creation of traditional dress was to tell a story (2021). "It is a song of a long-gone world, when the sun rises only for heroes, virgins, good people and gifts" (2021).

However, as years have gone by and we have moved into the modern world, more people have become interested in traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk costumes. This is motivated by the strength of identity and yearning for authenticity. Folk costumes are continuing to be celebrated, and facilities and people are taking care of, and restoring traditional costumes, allowing people's stories of the past to continue to be told.

There are young fashion designers in this day and age who are inspired by traditional costumes. They are taking this old aesthetic and converting it to a modern style to tell their own story of cultural identity. This is similar to what people did in the past, using their resources and relationships with their surroundings and expressing that through a

garment. Now there are more materials, technology, and resources to elevate the story in this new era.

Despite the fact that the traditional Romanian and Moldovan folk costume has gone through many changes over the last few decades, the same message from the past is still embedded in the concept behind the creation of the costume. To tell a visual story of the identity of the creator and the wearer.



Fig. 27 Edinet District, North of Moldova, Ion Chibzii, The 1980's.

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