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SPORTS' SOCIOLOGY

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Review of Cristina Gavriluță, Nicu Gavriluță, *Sociologia sportului. Teorii, metode, aplicații* (Sports' Sociology. Theories, methods, applications), (Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2010)

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In the contemporary society one cannot ignore the necessity of reflecting on some distinct theories, methods, or practices in the field of sociology of sports. Sociology has expanded its field of investigation to such an extent that its development on new areas or on some new levels or horizons of the social reality becomes a common fact for researchers. The evolution of the specializations and sub-fields of sociology has known an unprecedented increase. As a result of the expansion of this field have appeared, among others, Sociology of Ethics, Sociology of Culture, Sociology of Science, Sociology of Knowledge, Sociology of Education, Medical Sociology, Rural Sociology, Urban Sociology, Military Sociology, International relations' Sociology, Economic Sociology, Sociology of Religion, Sports' Sociology etc.

The volume *Sports' Sociology. Theories, methods, applications*, written by Cristina Gavriluță and Nicu Gavriluță (two of the most prominent names in the field of academic research of the young generation of sociologists and anthropologists) draws our attention on this latter sub-field.

Cristina Gavriluță is a sociologist and anthropologist and works as a Ph.D lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social and Political Sciences of Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi. Cristina Gavriluță's original perspective on the interpretation of divination and on the social phenomena, from an anthropological viewpoint, is particularly remarkable. Her work is not by chance considered by exegetes as "an academic product to be regarded as a milestone in the socio-anthropological Romanian literature".¹

Well known sociologist, anthropologist, and essayist, Ph. D. Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, Al. I. Cuza University, Nicu Gavriluță has the merit of bringing a new perspective in the sociological and anthropological research in Romania. Thus, "valuing his creativity as a professor and researcher, the author relies on the intellectual performance of current ideas and interpretations. Through his work he contributes to a renewal of the anthropological discourse and also to re-establishing of the discipline according to the contemporary social and cultural realities."²

In Romania, the researches regarding sport's sociology are only at the beginning. These types of intercessions are included into the trial to sketch the level, on which the sport is situated within the Romanian area, including all the things that are supposed by the administrative organization of the sport's field. The book written by Cristina Gavriluță and Nicu Gavriluță does not avoid the classic themes regarding the importance of people's education in favour of an active life, the importance of stimulating and organizing sport events, the importance of selling sports equipment from the perspective of the producers and of the specialized sellers etc.³ Though, beyond general sociological issues and certain technical aspects, one of the questions that the book attempts to

answer to is: *how can we explain the fact that sports exert a powerful fascination on large categories of population?*

A possible answer can be found within the chapters that reflect the constant and remarkable preoccupations that the two authors have in the field of sociology and anthropology of religion.⁴ This perspective analyses the sports phenomena as being strongly related to the evolution of the role of the religious feeling within the modern society. It brings up not only the image of a separation between religion and politics, between church and state⁵, but also the image of the loss of the sacred within the public space⁶, or the image of the redistribution of roles and responsibilities regarding institutional decisions and public politics.⁷ Thus, the analysed field falls under the influence of the secularization paradigm as an explicative model of the rapport between modernization and religion.

One of the most well-known ways of expression of the secularization's thesis is the acceptance of the fact that religion does not have any longer, through an institutional and spiritual power, at least on the surface, the influence it used to have in the past, within the modern society in the public area. We recall the fact that "for the traditional man, the history is no longer the past. It includes past, present and future⁸, under the sign of a sacred symbolism". We suppose that the modern man assumes his atemporal existence, one that lives within history, and loses exactly this unifying capacity that the symbolic dimension brings along. This incapacity of living a significant time makes the modern man a catch for the theory of the daily time, which is the time of work. A way of escaping the terror of work time is revealed by Mircea Eliade as a trial of the modern man to live within a significant time by escaping into a time he considers to be filled with a special significance and feeling.

Such a time can be found when participating in sporting events. This escape from time is accompanied by a whole complex of mythical, symbolical, and ritual structures that the modern man perceives under the sign of entertainment. All these elements are academically analysed in an admirable way by the authors of the present volume, using a persuasive bibliography and also the reflections presented in their previous work, really significant for sociological and anthropological research in Romania.

An important premise of the book is that symbolical imagination is a human constant. Therefore, irrational fantasies and elements are still dominant aspects of the modern individual and collective imagery. Thus, they may be born or manifested in the most diverse places and in the most unusual forms.⁹ It is obvious that "behind the logic or non logic of a gesture, act, behaviour, etc, there is a whole system of collective representations that can often work even against the official ideas and representations."¹⁰ This statement is also applicable to the field of sports, moreover to the social stereotypes built around it.

In this context, of a secularized world, in which although the symbol does not disappear is no longer clearly and correctly perceived, the myth degrades itself or transforms into a simple story. The ritual behaviours camouflage themselves into gestures that are perceived as profane. Cristina and Nicu Gavriluţă suggest us to understand the behaviour and the mentality that dominates the sports phenomena from the perspective of the classic symbols and myths, even though the latter undergo a series of mutations within the secular context of the modern sporting practice. Thus, "the sports' signs and symbols are the concrete expression of the fact that, in the modern world, the man cannot give up the signs and symbols for good. The durability of the images and symbols that populate our inner space is a well known fact. Mircea Eliade stated that a symbol once on move never dies. It can shape, acquires new meanings, can become trite, but will continue to resist and to exert fascination upon the human nature."¹¹

One of the most important premises of the book is build upon the thinking of Marc Auge who considers "the contemporary ritual activity as a profane formula to harmonize identity and alterability, two notions that have always caused problems at social level. Thus, the crisis of the modern world is one that regards the construction of alterability and, starting from there, an identity crisis."¹² Sport is one of the ways through which the authors hope that the distance can be diminished, at the level of the community behaviour, caused by "*disappearance of the symbolic connection*". The symbolic and ritualistic behaviours are the ones that lead to creation of a group spirit similar to the group identity. This component of the community identity implied in the association between the mythic and ritualistic behaviours becomes visible when it comes to the attitudes that the contemporary man has in rapport with the exemplary characters, assimilated sometimes to the myth of the saviour, but more often to the myth of the hero that concentrates the positive energy of a whole community.

As one can easily notice, from the analysis proposed by Cristina and Nicu Gavriluţă, Romanians have, as a special component of the national mythology, the tendency to identify, even to merge almost instantly, with the hero's condition. In this direction, an enlightening example is that of the Romanian sportsman Lucian Bute whose victory is considered a victory of the whole community. The victory is attributed to all Romanians. The symbolism, the initiation ritual, and the erotic myths all play an important role both in religious and sporting manifestations. Besides the mythic and magic structures implied, in this case, "the symbolic connection is ensured by ritual. Thus, connections are being established between identity and alterability, regardless whether they are about a *limited ritual device* or about an *expanded ritual device*".¹³

The discussion about mythic, symbolic, and ritualistic behaviours becomes possible only when we accept the reality of the phenomenon that

is best known in the analysis of religions as the dialectics of the sacred and the profane. This implies a profane element in terms of modern man's forgetting the traditional ways of experiencing religion, but also, his rediscovering the need of meaning and identity.

This desacralizing of the world by transforming the field of sacred into a secular field is perceived by Cristina and Nicu Gavriluță as being influenced by Durkheim's analyses that have as supposition the taking over by the state and the modern institutions of some functions and practices that once appertained to religions. Even though sports' sociology doesn't go that far, it is obvious that a reading from a socio-anthropological perspective of the sports phenomena cannot leave aside the decoding of its symbolic dimension. And this is exactly the merit of the volume presented by Cristina and Nicu Gavriluță. It combines the sociological, didactical and technical discussions with the hidden, less accessible part that derives from the archaic cultural background, assumed as a consubstantial gift of the human condition.

Notes:

¹ Sandu Frunză, "Cristina Gavriluță, The Socio - Anthropology of Divinatory Phenomena" in *Sociologie Românească*, Volume VIII, No. 1/ (2010).

² Sandu Frunză, "Nicu Gavriluță, Social and Cultural Anthropology" in *Sociologie Românească*, Volume VIII, No. 2/ 2010, 184-185. See also Ilie Rad, Aurel Codoban, Nicolae Crețu, "Three Perspectives on a Journalistic Approach", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 9, no. 27 (Winter 2010): 344-355.

³ Various Aspects Regarding the Research in the Field of Sports' Sociology can be found in F. Lebreton, G. Routier, S. Heas, et al., "Urban Cultures and Physical and Sporting Activities. The "Sportification" of Parkour and Street Golf as Cultural Mediation", *Canadian Review of Sociology-Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, Vol. 47 Issue3 (2010): 293-317; C. Shilling, "Educating the Body - Physical Capital and the Production of Social Inequalities", *Sociology-The Journal of The British Sociological Association*, Vol. 25 Issue 4 (Nov 1991): 653-672; A. Dewar, "Would All the Generic Women in Sport Please Stand Up - Challenges Facing Feminist Sport Sociology", *Quest*, Vol. 45 Issue 2 (May 1993): 211-229. An interesting paper which advances the Appreciative Inquiry approach as a culturally sensitive method as a means of identifying the success factors in mass sports programs is Zainah Shariff, Bernadine Van Gramberg, Patrick Foley, "The Usefulness of Appreciative Inquiry as a Method to Identify Mass Sports Program Success", *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, No. 30E (2010): 118-131.

⁴ Appreciations regarding Nicu Gavriluță and Cristina Gavriluță's contribution to the anthropologic research of the religious phenomenon, see in Moisuc Cristian, "Social and Cultural Anthropology", in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol. 9 Issue 25 (2010): 195-199; Otilia Hedeşan, "The Socio Anthropology of the Religious Phenomenon", in *Orizont*, 2004; Tudorel Urian, "The Dilemmas of the (post) modern man", *Literary Romanian*, nr. 32/2008.

⁵ "Religious reflection may still be relevant for the spiritual problems of individuals, for the responses they seek to varied personal problems, but it must

not be a reference in the modernization of the state, in institutional reconstruction, in the public policies of the lay state", we can read in Sandu Frunză, "On the Need for a Model of Social Responsibility and Public Action as an Ethical Base for Adequate, Ethical and Efficient Resource Allocation in the Public Health System of Romania", *Revista de cercetare şi intervenţie socială*, vol. 33 (2011): 180. For an abstract on this debate in Romania see Cătălin Vasile Bobb, "Between God and Cesar", in *Tribuna*, no. 55, (16-31 December 2004): 5. See also Liviu Andreescu, "Double or Nothing: Academic Theology and Post-Communist Religious Policy", *Journal of Church and State*, 52 (3) (2010): 540-570.

⁶ Mihaela Frunză, Sandu Frunză, "Ethics, Superstition and the Laicization of the Public Sphere" in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 8, nr. 23, (Summer 2009): 13-35. See also Sikka Sonia, "Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and the Case for Public Religion", *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 3 Issue 3 (Dec. 2010): 580-609.

⁷ Sandu Frunză, "Ethical Responsibility and Social Responsibility of Organizations Involved in the Public Health System", *Revista de cercetare şi intervenţie socială*, vol. 32 (2011): 156-157. Similar perspectives in Nicu Gavriluţă, *Mama proştilor e mereu gravidă. Sociologia patologiilor cotidiene*, (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2010).

⁸ Cristina Gavriluţă, *The Socio Anthropology of the Religious Phenomenon*, (Iaşi: Fundaţia AXIS Publishing House, 2003), 138-139.

⁹ Cristina Gavriluţă, Nicu Gavriluţă, *Sports' Sociology. Theories, Methods, Applications*. (Iaşi: Polirom Publishing House, 2010), 169-170. We can say, at the same time, that "if there is an emaciation or a drying up of the myth, on one hand, and an analysis of creation, on the other hand, we can ask what becomes the collective imagery. In this case it is, without any doubt, less fed by an original fiction or by the collective myth. Thus, it has to defeat a crisis, and this can be translated by a passive behaviour of the consumption of image that discloses the fiction" Cristina Gavriluţă, *The Sacred and the Californication of Culture. Seven Interviews about Religion and Globalization*, (Bucureşti: Paideia Publishing House, 2008).

¹⁰ Cristina Gavriluţă, *The Socio Anthropology of Divinatory Phenomena*, (Iaşi: Institutul European Publishing House, 2008), 235.

¹¹ Cristina Gavriluţă, Nicu Gavriluţă, *Sports' Sociology*, 175.

¹² Cristina Gavriluţă, Nicu Gavriluţă, *Sports' Sociology*, 48.

¹³ Cristina Gavriluţă, Nicu Gavriluţă, *Sports Sociology*, 148.