

Research paper on follow of tradition

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Traditional culture in each nation was founded on specific intimate relationships, based on particular living standards and certain moral qualities, on a rich cultural system made out of customs and distinct elements of great depth, all related to essential hypostases of life: birth, youth, marriage, maturity and death. The word tradition, etymologically, has its roots in the Latin language where it meant transmission. In time, the word acquired a broader understanding: cultural values and/or historical heritage. The concept of tradition in particular, can be characterized as psycho-social, multiple, and dynamic, phenomenon which ensures the participation to a specific system of material and spiritual values that has a relative stability. In certain cases, tradition is seen as continuity and is not just a way of thinking but also a way of living (*sursa*).

Tradition had and still has its critics. Shirley Jackson was one of the few writers who portrayed (maybe too early in time) a society based on blind tradition that degenerates and triggers the involution of humanity back to a barbaric state. Shirley Jackson (1916 -1965) was very popular during her lifetime, but nowadays she has fallen into a certain level of obscurity.

Jackson is what is called “ the writers’ writer”, a popular writer among the writers, but less popular among critics and also with the public. Among those who cited her as an influence are included Joyce Carol Oates, Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. The first paragraph of her first novel “ The Haunting of Hill House” stands as a motto on King's novel “ Salem's Lot”.

With “ The Lottery”, written and published in 1948, Shirley Jackson proved to be far ahead of her time. The story appeared in *The New Yorker* and caused unspeakable indignation among readers. The editorial staff received an

avalanche of protests, and some readers canceled their subscriptions or have sent threatening letters to the author. Others, with a curious sense of humor, complained that they did not understand it. “ What Happened with the paragraph that tells what the devil is going on?” complained one reader (Oppenheimer 11).

The story’s action takes place in modern times in a rural community. Here, the community is in the middle of preparations for their annual main event: a lottery. The entire story is a psychological battle between individual morals and tradition (or better said following the masses). The story takes places in a beautiful day, people are gathered in the town square, and all are getting ready for the ritual, but, with a certain release given by the years of continues practice, are presented the old days when traditions were more stringent and the formalities more complicated.

A very important clue related to the scope of the story is also presented: other communities have already given up this tradition. All transmits the impression of a ritual that has lost its weight and importance, but is continued by virtue of inertia, of tradition: “ There's Always Been a Lottery” (Jackson 6) says one of the participants to the event. Gradually, however, as the people prepare to play their parts, in the text start to appear vague and unsettling signs of distress. Everyone takes part in the event, lists are made, and somehow we understand that participation is not voluntary but compulsory. The results are expected not with the anticipation of gain, but in increasing tension. The façade of friendship, good neighborliness and peaceful community proves to be only an appearance. The lottery will decide which member of the community will be devoured – it is a symbolism of

cannibalism.

For this present paper, the morbid and horrifying details will be skipped and only the basic question that transposes from the text will be addressed: how can tradition be evaluated and how can one determine if a tradition is good or bad?

What is tradition? Who does not have traditions? The Pythagorean Theorem is part of a tradition. Mendeleev's table as well. But how can one apply traditions to a community or a society? The author of “ The Lottery” takes the matters to the extremes in order to offer an amalgam of literature and psychological inquiry. But the question regarding the psychology of the masses and the existence of individual ethics are still very fresh. In “ The Crowd”, Gustave Le Bon (1895) states that “ the crowd is always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual” (Le Bon 34). A cluster of people have new features, different from those of the separate individuals that form it. Conscious personality disappears; feelings and ideas are all oriented in one and the same direction. There is a transient collective soul. An important characteristic of the masses is represented by mental contagion: in a crowd any feeling and any act is contagious, it can cause the individual to sacrifice his personal interest in favor of the collective ones. Conscious personality disappears, and discernment is abolished. The individual is no longer conceit of his acts. In addition, crowds are very easily subjected to suggestion. The images evoked in their spirit are easily understood as reality. These images are similar for all individuals that make up a crowd. Crowds do not know any certainty and doubt, and always go to extremes. It is the image presented also by the author of “ The Lottery”.

The main character of the short story is the entire town. The individuals that take part in this activity have different opinions on the lottery and on the rituals related to it. Each one of them has some kind of internalization to the entire tradition. However, as a whole, they are the main character that transcends the inner feelings and acts like a crowd, following the leader, and never disputing his authority and decisions.

However, Jackson is raising also the problem of the use of tradition in order to dissimulate individual evil. An evil that resides in tradition, customs and rituals. As stated in the beginning of this paper, it is a return (or better said a continuation of) to barbarism that nowadays has no explanation. Barbary had the excuse that people explained things that did not understand through superstitions and strange beliefs. The modern man does not have this excuse. However, it hides his horrific nature in traditions. It is also a perpetual resistance to change that is one of the most important barriers to civilization (civilization as promoted by humanity) along with fear and hope. Tradition and the execution of specific rituals ultimately can provide the excuse for any evil. It is the annihilation of individual ethics. It is impossible to exclude tradition from a community. If we are to take things to extreme, the complete exclusion of tradition would create a void of educational elements, and finally to the disappearance of the concept of society and community due to a lack of common elements to unite the individuals. And like this we are back to the theory of the masses. Each individual needs to be able to sustain with actions his or her ethical beliefs and to have the ability to make the difference between the personal beliefs and the beliefs of the group and thus to be able not to act contrary to the individual moral and

ethical convictions.

A modern element that can be extracted from this entire presentation can lead to the concept of globalization – globalization not just economical but also cultural. An authentic culture with a strong foundation in time, constructed of immutable traditions and values cannot miss the “ seal” of the place in which it has emerged and matured.

According to U. Beck, Roland Robertson is proposing a paronymic alternative to globalization namely “ glocalization”, a notion which completes the semantic content of the first and “ softens” the globalization theories which saw in this phenomenon something “ universal and one-dimensiona”(Beck 11).

Any culture that also incorporates traditions, regardless of its size or the impact it had on history, exhibits a strong tendency towards coagulating its own values (but also evils), a constant engagement in an effort to survive, to counter the influences that can be fatal for its own identity. The likelihood of a “ re-tribalization” as McLuhan see the development of contemporary civilization, based on the cultural homogenization phenomenon and on the accelerated propagation of electronic media, can be treated as an assumption and taken into consideration for a further understanding of the future that becomes, with each day, more and more confusing (McLuhan 21). Despite the gloomy forecasts, we cannot rise to a level of indisputable truth the phenomenon of total flattening of the modern man and his transformation into a trivial surface.

In not so many words, culture is just a mix or a collection of elements that are stamped in a person’s behavior even from birth. These roots will remain

forever in his subconscious, as basic and archetypal cultural manifestations that will probably be altered in time by the contact with other cultures and other people. However, their influence remains indisputable and the perspective of a global tradition is far from becoming a reality.

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