



DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHEOLOGY  
AND SOCIAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY  
UiT, THE  
ARCTIC  
UNIVERSITY OF  
NORWAY

LIVING THE FOLKLORE.  
MEMORY, PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY  
CONSTRUCTION . THE CASE OF EMPI ET  
RIAUME



**Master thesis by Boyka Todorova**  
**Supervisor Bente Sundsvold**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

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## PERSONAL MOTIVATION

*Folklore is that part of culture that "lives happily ever after."*

*Elliott Oring*

My mother use to have a book, called "Holiday at home" that contained traditional Bulgarian meals according to each of our biggest holidays. In between the recipes there were mentioned specific folk practices, games, sayings and even several songs that accompany the traditional family gathering within a holiday event. The book was published in 1992 which makes it almost as old as me (I was born in 1990). When I was a child I use to page trough it all the time, finding amusement in the small pieces of folklore. I clearly remember my joy and excitement when a holiday was approaching and me rushing to find out a new game we'll play around the table and what meal we'll cook together with my mother. I grew up in a family where traditions were highly valued and carefully elaborated and followed. I never bothered to ask myself if other families are doing so, neither how is this affecting my own family at all. Then at the age of 20 I left Bulgaria and started my studies in southern France.

While living abroad, the more encounters I had with people from different cultures, the more I was discovering the diversity of customs and rituals around me. I started perceiving the proud I had about my folklore traditions, and the eager I had showing and sharing them with other people. Of course living abroad is somehow inevitably connected to a certain level of nostalgia and homesickness, and these traditional practices were maybe a natural way of connecting myself with my homeland, or making a statement of my Bulgarian identity in this foreign country.

Clearly I was not the only one doing so. Southern France, and especially Nice is in a way a crossroad for multiple cultures. I was living in one of the "Arabic neighborhoods" and a simple spending of 15 minutes at the little vegetables market down the street was enough for me to perceive customs and behavior different from the French one, different only in details, but these details were something so specific, and so preserved especially by the older generations in the neighborhood. I was fascinated by how much people hold on to their traditions, how they carry their folklore in the normal daily life - the food they seek, the clothes they wear, the places they meet and the way they execute these meetings. Every morning I was drinking my coffee on my balcony and I was able to observe from above the old Algerians gathering in one part of the street, hanging there for hours, talking and spending time together - just standing at the corner of the street. Even though it's often an

unconscious process, the folklore is the shared ideas and values of a group of people, learned in relation of the surroundings. I could only imagine that the young generation of Algerians who were probably born in France - the sons of these men down the street, they wouldn't be able to know and adopt these morning gatherings if their parents were not doing it. This young generation Algerians would probably adopt more French ways of being, if they were not having their fathers example to show them this typical behavior. In this logic I assumed that a concrete behavior and concrete traditions and folklore practices are in a way a part of one's identity building. And most of all - this part of one's identity is related to a complex process of transition and connection between the generations, and somehow a connection to the past. The folklorist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Dan Ben-Amos states, that folklore is "*very much an organic phenomenon in sense that it is an integral part of culture*", so once adopted - it becomes incorporated in our mind. As we are a reflection of the identity we build by ourselves, I was absolutely fascinated how much the folklore can do in this process , and in what way.

Each time we gather around the table with my family in law, we listen the stories of the folklore adventures from the youth years of my father in law - Giovanni Gulino. I love these stories - it is almost like the fairytales my grandfather use to tell me before sleep when I was a kid. At least the pampering feeling of coziness and childish curiosity in me is the same. The conversation is developing towards the folklore experiences of his two sons, so the discussion gets vivid, describing unique situations and comparing the past and the present of the folklore life. What amuses me are the remarkable situations, but the most fascinating thing is the great smile those stories are bringing, the unique sparkle in the narrator's eyes. I am picturing in my head the amusement of the rehearsals, the emotions of the performances, the joy of the travels and the thrill of meeting new people, discovering new places, approaching new cultures. All these stories are precious to me, but there is one of them much more special than the others.

Giovanni Gulino was a young dancer and choreographer in the folklore dance group "Citta di Agrigento", Sicily. In 1981 his group has been invited to participate in the International folklore Festival of Romans-sur-Isere, France. Giovanni was not enthusiastic at all about the event, as the group was preparing for other travels, and especially since nobody ever heard of this little city, neither of this particular festival. Eventually in the end they accepted, and the group of Giovanni took the train to French Alps.

The Sicilians arrived in a small picturesque town to spent 3 days with several other foreign dance groups from around the world. The town Tourist office was helping the festival organizers. The responsibility to translate the speeches, and

to show the city to the dancers was given to a young girl, called Elena. She was speaking fluent English and perfect Italian. While translating on stage Elena saw one foreign dancer taking a photo of her. Later, curious about the photo she approached the young Sicilian, and asked him if she could have a copy, so she could show it to her family. The answer of Giovanni was short and clear *"Yes, of course, but only if you tell me your name, and if we go out for a walk tonight!"*.

The 3 days of the Festival passed fast as a blink of an eye. The dance groups went away, but before leaving Elena gave her address to Giovanni, so he can send her the photo. The magic of the Folklore dance festival was brief but rich enough, that only a year after it, Giovanni and Elena got married.

The Folklore festival was absolutely life changing for the young Sicilian, who settled with his wife in the city of Romans-sus-Isere. He became a part of the local folklore dance group *Empi et Riaume* - the one that organizes and hosts the International Folklore dance Festival. Within the years their two sons -Alessandro and Luca also joined *Empi et Riaume*. The family stayed closely related with the folklore life for many years, which shaped a big part of their story and life.

Every time we discuss these stories, I can clearly see that folklore is not just a simple hobby for Giovanni, it has a significant role in his personal path, his worldview, the way he was growing up his children... Gradually I started questioning to what degree does folklore influence or transform peoples life or viewpoint? What does folklore bring to people and how generation after generation, these ancient practices keep on finding their place, no matter how much the society changes towards modernity. All this of course concerns people, who are folklore involved. Thinking in a bigger perspective, is the folklore only influencing the folklorists, or a bigger part of the society? *"Yes, folklore is folk songs and legends. It's also quilts, Boy Scout badges, high school marching band initiations, jokes, chain letters, nicknames, holiday food . . . and many other things you might or might not expect. Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories. Folklore is present in many kinds of informal communication, whether verbal (oral and written texts), customary (behaviors, rituals) or material (physical objects). It involves values, traditions, ways of thinking and behaving."*(Sims, Stephens; 2011) It seems that folklore can be found in many forms and has multiple facets. I can clearly say that folklore is having impact on my way of life as well, even though I am not officially a folklorist, I am practicing traditions from my culture in my daily life, most of the times without noticing it. It seems that folklore is incorporated deeply into our way of being, therefore questioning its role in our social reality is worth exploring.

Gradually it became clear to me - if I wanted to get closer to the folklore world I was listening so much about, I needed to go to the source of these stories. I

was going in the small French city of Romans -sur-Isere to get to know the group of Empi et Riaume in a search of answers.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EMPI ET RIAUME

*"Similarly, after the upheaval of the World War I, she measured the danger of uniformity, threatening the local customs - so rich in traditions and symbols. She brought all her energy and enthusiasm to the creation of her folklore group Empi et Riaume, and she communicated them to those who are part of it since 50 already."*

*from "Tribute to Marie-Madeleine Bouvier"<sup>1</sup>*

A major part of the knowledge related to the history of Empi et Riaume has been collected as a result of consulting the archives of the association. In the following part I am basing myself on the copies of multiple documents, that Giselle, the group's archive keeper, kindly shared with me.

Born in 3th of March 1892, Miss Marie-Madeleine Bouvier, was a citizen of Romans-sur-Isere. Her outstanding character was deeply marked by the regionalism and the local folklore. In 1926 she creates "Circle of regionalist and folklore studies" that in 1932 has been named Regionalist and Folkloric association "Friends of the Mistral" after the name of a strong, northwesterly wind, blowing from southern France into the Gulf of Lion. Later on, under the influence of the poet and writer Charles Forot, Miss Bouvier oriented her researches towards the popular traditions, and in 1934 she founded what is known today as the group Empi et Riaume.

The name of Empi et Riaume was inspired form the shouts of the sailors of the Rhone river. As they sailed, they were indicating the Kingdom of France on one side and the Holy Roman Empire on the other. The province of Dauphiné was representing the "Empi" (Empire) and the province of Vivarais - the "Riaume" (Royaume is French word for Kingdom).

In the very beginning the group was not specialized in dance. The activity of Empi et Riaume was at first focused on theater plays. Shortly after that members incorporated some new elements to their performances and gradually they were focusing more and more on folklore dances, putting on the stage the movements, figures, music and costumes they were collecting within years of research.

In the period of the World War II the association was having intense activity. Empi et Riaume was accepting multiple invitations from the Prisoners Rescue Committees of France. The performances were innumerable, sometimes the shows

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<sup>1</sup> The tribute is part of the fascicle *Empi et Riaume - 50 ans de folklore*, released in 1984

were two on the same day - held in places kilometers away one from another. At times traveling from one place to another was uncertain and dangerous. They were using bikes - 3 dancers on a bike, with the president of the group back in the trailer. The cycles were going quickly out of use, so the remaining kilometers were being continued by foot by dancers bearing costumes and accessories on their backs, no matter the weather. These travels were often risky, but they created many anecdotes.

All her life Marie-Madeleine Bouvier's efforts were directed towards the preservation of the cultural heritage of the regions of Dauphiné and Vivarais (the two sides of the Rhone river). Hers and her dancer's researches led to the formation of a rich repertoire - more than 50 authentic dances, multiple traditional songs and music, numerous tales and legends. Miss Bouvier states that the program of their performances includes "mythical dances, dances derived of ancient pagan cults, seasonal dances (attached to ancient customs and harvest festivals etc ...) burlesque and celebrations". Miss Bouvier was pronounced Chevalier (Knight) of the National Order of Merit, for distinguished civil achievements. She died the 14th of July 1982, at the age of 92. Until her last day she was taking the position of President of Empi et Riaume.

The fact that the very beginning of Empi et Riaume is connected with the aim of one woman to save the local customs, that has been threatened by uniformity puts a specific aspect to the role of the group, and the way they see the folklore heritage. Folklore is not there in the position of a simple heritage, or something these people simply perform. It has also its academic aspect - through the research and careful selection and examination from the part of Empi et Riaume members.

## QUESTIONS ASSUMPTIONS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

*"Folklore, like any other art, is a symbolic kind of action. Its forms have symbolic significance reaching far beyond the explicit content of the particular text, melody, or artifact."*

*Ben-Amos*

Folklore is profoundly developed and observed by folklorists and anthropologists in a huge diversity of ways. It is a symbolic kind of action, a mediator between the past and the present, through the practice of dances, songs, stories, tales, costumes, tools, buildings, instruments etc. But folklore as dance is also a bodily, practical and performative expression, closely related with the social identity of the dancer. It is a fertile area for investigating people's life and the wide variety of creative expression they have. The "symbolic significance" of these



practices are connected to many explicit and implicit social processes. Therefore a large scale of questions, concerning the folk life could be raised, as the depth of the field is astonishingly vast. Having this in mind, I will narrow down my problematic within few questions listed further in this chapter, that will direct my research. My interest won't be the interpretation or the analysis of a specific folklore, but through following the life of Empi et Riaume I will rather focus on the outcome of "living a folklore life", or said otherwise - being connected with a folklore activity within the context of people's social reality and identity construction.

I assume that like every activity - the folklore dance have the capacity of changing people's viewpoint in many domains, however having in mind that it is a *group* activity, I would like to explore the social connections being constructed within this framework. Therefore I would like to get a closer look of the group dynamics and the multiple layers of connections between people in the Empi et Riaume association. I will explore the group of Empi et Riaume as a fruitful milieu of forming and maintaining specific social relations.

Empi et Riaume, or shortly "Empi" consists mainly of family connected members. In his book 'The family's construction of reality' David Reiss presents a model of family interaction based in the complex way in which a family constructs its inner life and deals with the outside world. I am following his statement, that "*The family does more than interact with the larger environment; it is itself a fundamental component of that environment*" (Reiss, 1981; 269), so I can approach how the family bonds are keeping the group alive, and how the members of Empi et Riaume experience the process of holding the group together.

I take a great inspiration from Anthony P. Cohen and his book "The symbolic construction of community", where the author describes the community as build by a complexity of symbols, accepted and understood differently by its members. He explores the way people are seeing and feeling themselves *belonging* to a community, which is a perspective that largely interests me.

Talking about the feeling of belonging to a community, inevitably I shall use the ideas of Victor Turner of 'communitas. I am using his theory that social dramas and conflict is a natural part of the life of a group of people, especially a community. Within the frame of my fieldwork experience the dance association was dealing with multiple difficult situations and it won't be exaggerated to refer to it as a "crisis". Connected to the specific familial relations within the group, I would like to follow the guiding of David Reiss, and explore the relation between the family bonds and the process of dealing with the crisis and overcoming problems. In his book *The Family's Construction of Reality* Reiss states "*Crisis makes the family particularly vulnerable to changes in its fundamental orientation towards itself and its social environment; the mode by which a family recovers from crisis contains the seeds for a more permanent form of family organization.*" (Reiss, 1981; 261). Following the theory of the

social constructivism, Reiss explores the family's construction of reality and its connection with the ability of solving problems. I would apply his ideas and the concept of family paradigm, in order to explore how Empi et Riaume is dealing with the problems, social dramas and outside threats that the group encounters. In this matter I agree with Reiss that "...*problem resolution cannot be understood apart from the ways families construct problems...*" ( Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Shumm, Steinmetz,2009 ;659) consequently my aim will be to bring an understanding of the reality construction of Empi et Riaume and how it connects with their efforts of overcoming the crisis situations.

Exploring the world of a folklore dance group, I aim to explore the bodily practices as a specific way of memory expression and preservation. Therefore the position of Paul Connerton, who treats memory as a cultural faculty, that he believes is closely related to the bodily incorporated practices. I use his book 'How societies remember' as a guidance to explore the performative memory of Empi et Riaume and how their activity connects the past with the present. In this context I am also having in mind the difference between History and Memory that creates a difference within the performative expression. I am inspired by the article of the French author Pierre Nora 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire' who treats the difference between the two notions, and the significance they have within a social frame.

Elizabeth Fine and Jean Haskell Speer connect the notions of Performance, Culture and Identity in a definitely intriguing way, "<..> *performance reveals, shapes, and sometimes transforms personal and cultural identity.*" (Fine, Speer, 1992; 11) The authors argue that artistic performance becomes a way of knowing self, culture and other. My hypothesis is that the bodily expression, such as folklore performance is an essential part of the social and cultural identity of people.

While treating memory, history and past, the question about change is unavoidably arising. Folklore expression is in constant change of its reputation, significance and function within the years. I will search for the ways that the group's memory is conveyed and sustained through their daily routines and performative activities. In his book "The dynamics of folklore" Barre Toelken states that "*folklore is ever-changing, always developing, on the move*". I wish to follow the folklore life in its aspect of a dynamic entity, and the importance of the changes and influences it can undergo. Being guided by the research of Anya Peterson Royce concerning the anthropology of dance, my assumption is that the fragile harmony between the past and the present is forming the folk expression in a specific way within each new generation. Royce claims that flexibility is an essential part of the dance performance, concerning its preservation through time and threats. In the context of the folklore dance group Empi et Riaume I would like to follow the processes and the tools of

transition and change of the practices, that will connect with the idea of connection between the generations.

In all these aspects I will incorporate the touch that the International Folklore Festival brings. What does the event bring to the members of Empi et Riaume, how does it affect them, their interconnections, their social reality, their interests etc. I wish to observe the Festival not only from the perspective of a confrontation of differences, but also as a process of exchange, influence and knowledge -building.

As folklore is dealing closely with culture, and folklore festivals are a cross-cultural meeting point, I am interested in finding out in what way festival events influence people's mindset regarding multiculturalism and differences, or any other possible sides. Therefore I would like to expand my understanding of the implication that folklore activities are having as cultural mediators.

## **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS**

Researcher's fieldwork experience is a guarantee for vast palette of encounters, emotions, memories and gathered knowledge. Making sense of it is a difficult task, but structuring everything in a comprehensive way for a reader who wasn't there is I must admit - absolutely challenging. Here I will explicitly briefly the main structure of my paper, so it could be easily perceived by the reader.

The next, second chapter is dedicated to the methodological tools I have been using within my fieldwork. I would like to stress the importance of the different approaches I've had, estimating that each one of them provoke the gathering of a fruitful information, that would be different in another type of methodological approach.

The third chapter in the paper is a brief context of the Fieldwork, stating a big part of the initial information I had when I arrived in Romans-sur-Isere. I can let the reader dive into the atmosphere of my research and create himself an idea about the place and the circumstances, before we proceed towards analysis.

Further I will expose and treat my research data, in connection with the already mentioned theoretical perspectives, within three chapters. Each one of them will be connected to my initial research questions and assumptions, within an attempt of verifying, developing and answering them. The three chapters are independent, and yet they are connected one with another. They consist of several sub chapters, sometimes with concrete examples following them.

Following will be the chapter of my conclusion, which will deal with summing up the conclusions of the theoretical and analytical process. It will also discuss some further questions and an eventual opening of the paper's problematic.

The very end of my paper presents the literature I've been using to support my ideas and to analyze my empirical data.

## II. METHODOLOGY

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### PERSONAL POSITIONING AND ACCESS

*"One's identity as a researcher is not the only identity we have that can facilitate access. Who you are and how you present yourself influence access."*

*Feldman, Bell, Berger*

Folklore is undoubtedly related to the notions of self knowledge, good self-esteem and therefore pride. This relation is so close, because I assume it is impossible to represent in front of people the folk of a whole nation, without being conscious about the value of it, and hence being proud of it. Related to this, as a stranger and anthropological researcher coming from a foreign country, one of my fears was the access and my own positioning in this group of people, who don't know me. I was afraid they won't fully understand what am I doing among them for a whole summer, and thus they would expect something different, especially after seeing me with my camera. I agree with Feldman, Bell and Berger that gaining access is a relational process. *"Seeing access as relational, moves us beyond the image of the door or single threshold that is either crossed or not."* (Feldman, Bell and Berger, 2003: xi) I was aware that my position among all these people won't just appear after I enter the rehearsal hall, and I was positive they won't just come and share all their thoughts, ideas and feelings with me, only because I am there to study their reality.

Therefore while following the ideas of Spradley and McCurdy who stated *"The best way is to find a middleman who can provide a human link between you and your informant."* (Spradley, McCurdy, 1972: 48) I was thinking about my already existing links with Empi et Riaume. Before entering my fieldwork I was expecting to have a person that will be my "main guide" into the group - Vincent Dal Capello. As a friend of mine that I know for 2 years, I was considering him as the perfect middleman. He use to be the choreographer and accordion player of Empi et Riaume for several years. He also is the son of the former leader of Empi et Riaume -Anne Marie Ciolfi. Unfortunately just few months before my arrival, he had to leave the Empi et Riaume, for reasons I will explicit later. And so forth it happened that I knew nobody in the dance group in person. I started exchanging e-mails with the secretary of Empi et Riaume - Veronique Cuvato, and with the vice-president of the group- Alain Champey in order to somehow secure my position. Later, when I arrived I understood that Veronique Cuvato was dismissed due to lack of money, so she was not there anymore.

I met Alain Champey for the first time at his workplace (a pharmacy in the center of the city) and in the end of our first conversation he proposed me to come to the group's dance practice the next day, so he can present me to the others. I was glad to be presented by someone, even though I wrote e-mails months before to explain who I am and what my research is about.

The next day at the practice there were several people of Empi's staff in the office, and all the dancers in the practice hall. Alain asked everyone for 2 minutes of attention and presented me briefly, letting me continue and tell few words about myself and my intentions. My expectations were to be presented as "student" or "researcher", "Bulgarian girl, living in Norway" or even "Boyka, who spent four years studying in France". For my biggest surprise Alain's words were :

*" Some of you can recall the Gulino family. Boyka is actually the daughter-in-law of Giovanni Gulino, she is the girlfriend of Luca and the sister-in-law of Alessandro."*

The Gulino family were deeply involved with Empi et Riaume for many years. After Giovanni and Elena first met in the Festival of Romans-sur-Isere in 1982 and got married an year after, Giovanni joined Empi et Riaume. . He was strongly implicated with the organization of the Festival itself and took the position of a choreographer for a while. His two sons - Alessandro and Luca use to dance in Empi et Riaume for several years, until the family moved to another town in the south of France. Even after that, when the group were in need of male dancers for an international travels - Luca and Alessandro were often there to help. The Gulino family is a well known name in the folklore milieu in Romans and therefore being presented as "a part of the Gulino's" put me in certain standpoint. I esteem I gained a more solid position. Furthermore, I was automatically been labeled as somehow a part of "the Empi et Riaume's family". By that time I was yet not fully aware of the strong significance of the family belonging status I got. I was about to discover the importance that the familial relations were carrying for these people.

Another strong influence of my positioning among the members of Empi was the place I was living while my stay in Romans-sur-Isere. I was accepted as a guest in Anne Marie Ciolfi's house. I want to precise that my stay there was negotiated by my mother in law- Elena Gulino, a close friend with Anne-Marie, who accepted me in her house for the period of almost 2 months, without even knowing me in person. Annie, as friends call her, was deeply involved with Empi et Riaume for the past 45 years. She started as a dancer at the age of 17 and she strongly dedicated her efforts and time to the folklore. Later in 1996 she became the president of the group, until 2014, when she had severe health issues, so she had to let go her position, and focus on her health recovering. Also, in 2011 Anne Marie was elected a president of CIOFF

France, an important position, as the International folklore Festival, organized by Empi et Riaume each year is certificated by CIOFF IN 2002, and four years later in 2006 the group of Empi et Riaume became itself a part of the CIOFF family.

It is recognized undoubtedly how big influence and contribution this woman had for the development of Empi et Riaume, and she is deeply respected by the group's members. Being a guest in her house was a great privilege for me and an advantage in terms of my positioning among the dancers. But most of all, being around Annie gave me another perspective to the current situation of Empi et Riaume and access to a huge amount of information, through our discussions. I was able in a first place to discuss many things, related to the folklore with Annie, and to listen to numerous stories and memories, but also I had the chance to see the ongoing processes within the group from an external point of view of a person who is not one of the dancers, but is incredibly competent and familiar with the milieu.

I fully agree with Feldman, Bell and Berger who defend the idea that researcher's identity should be a matter of awareness. *"It is useful in assessing the information that you receive to be aware of how one's identity may influence why some people are providing information and others are withholding it."* (Feldman, Bell and Berger, 2003: 43) Therefore reflecting about my case, the global image I had in front of the members of Empi et Riaume was complex enough. I was associated as "a part of Gulino's family", "guest of Anne- Marie" and "friend of Vincent". These tree connections were the pillars of my image and identity for the people in Empi et Riaume. My connections were much related to the way I was perceived and what I was shown and been intentionally told, as I was already seen as a part of the whole, within the context of a complex social situation. I also need to note, that as Feldman and her fellow colleagues are stating *"Identity is important not only in relation to the people one is studying but also in relation to oneself."* (Feldman, Bell and Berger, 2003: 44) and consequently I was trying to follow the helpful hint given by Enomoto - and be aware of my subjectivities. In the very beginning I gave myself the task to never take the viewpoint of the people I am close with, but to observe the situations from aside.

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

*"From the early days of the discipline, folklorists have gone "into the field" to study the songs, stories, artifacts, behaviors and beliefs of the cultural groups about which they have written."*

*M. Sims, M. Stephens*

As anthropology is neither only theoretical discipline, nor fully methodological one, the combination of both is absolutely necessary. Participant

observation is perceived as one of the central and most common methods in ethnography and cultural anthropology. Therefore I must admit, that I didn't have a big hesitation about using this method, it was almost natural. While I was among my informants I had the time to reflect upon the positive outcomes of my "participation" in their activities and daily life. Further I explain the difference it made for me and my research not only to be there and see, but to be there and to do.

I was exploring a new and unknown for me field - the folklore, I was fearing I will have an "outside" look towards my informant's problems and motivations. My concern was if I was able to fully understand their point of view, and to see beyond the ideas of a simple spectator. Sometimes informants and study subjects feel misunderstood even after the research is over. I wanted to avoid this situation and dip entirely into the social reality of this group of people, therefore from the very beginning I made sure that I am not only going to be a simple permanent presence, but I am going to be an active actor in the daily activities of the group. This way I was ensuring my own comprehension of the happening and the experience of the feelings of the members of Empi et Riaume in the closest way. Helping them in their daily life not only helped me understand their point of view better, but it also created bridges between me and the group of strangers I was trying to connect with. This also gave me the possibility of having casual conversations, different from my interviews - more open and unstructured, but also not giving my informants the feeling of being interviewed, and letting them open up easily.

Considering the concepts of Etic and Emic understanding of my informants social behavior, the participative observation was strongly meaningful for my research. Being involved in the activities of the dance group gave me the possibility of acquiring an Emic approach - seeing the situations from within the group, and taking their perspective. Later, away from my fieldwork, while I was creating my documentary film I could afford myself taking an Etic perspective, I could analyze the case impartially.

The last aspect of the participant observation process I would like to discuss is the ethical concerns. The summer spend with the group of Empi et Riaume I was witnessing a highly complicated situation in many aspects. The interpersonal dynamics within the group were extremely complex and delicate. Therefore as a researcher who is directly implicated with the daily life of the collectivity I was facing the concern of "not taking a side" when it comes to a conflict situation or a problem. Especially having in mind that I was in a position, having feedback from each side and discovering many opinions of a single situation, for me it was important to state impartiality and to take as objectively as possible all the statements and points of view, without influencing my own.

## CAMERA WORK

*“The motion of film and the added dimension of sound, as with video, can give us not only the content but also the emotional flavor of human activities.”*

*Collier, Collier*

Having as research object a folklore dance group, body movement, relationship between rhythm, gesture, music etc. have strong importance for my study case. Many researchers are appreciating the video as almost limitless search tool in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies. I fully agree that the use of a camera is a splendid way to expose multiple facets of the folk expression. The use of visual methods were incredibly fruitful, and gave me the possibility of seeing the situations from a brand new angle. Over the weeks of filming I gathered splendid, colorful and rich material I was waiting impatiently to go through and analyze. However I feel the need to express the feeling I had back then, having a camera while conducting my study.

As a new person within Empi et Riaume, the group members were not familiar with me, therefore I took the first two weeks as a possibility to get to know them, and to let them know me better before I take out the camera. Consequently I was fearing that my first impressions, the ones I was considering the strongest - going to pass and after a while, all the enthusiasm of the fresh encounter with the new will fade. I feared taking things for granted and not filming them. Once I felt ready to take the camera with me I experienced a whole new level of emotions. In a first place I could certainly say, that the camera itself was an additional disruptor and it took some time for my informants to feel free to act around me, while I was filming. Some of them were very conscious about themselves being recorded, and avoided my camera as much as they could, others were posing - as I could see how joyful and full of jokes they became, while being in the frame. In this context I could admit that camera was a catalyst in some situations, and the opposite for others. In many situations when I press the recording button - everything was changing - people's behavior, way of talking etc. While my stay in Empi et Riaume, it was a time of multiple problems and conflicts for the dance group, but I got none of this on tape, no matter how hard I tried. I can only assume that proud of these people was strong enough, so they didn't want to show their problems to the camera, but only the good side of the story.

Other difficult decision making that occurred for me while filming were the choices of positioning and focusing I needed to make. As Angela Fitzgerald puts it *"Video can enable the capture of rich and detailed data. At a basic level, video data can be collected through setting up a camera and recording what occurs. But in moving beyond this level, there are numerous choices that need to be made each time videoing is planned."* (Fitzgerald, 2011: 2) I was often in a dilemma what exactly to film, as there were happening multiple things in the same moment, not only in the rehearsal hall,



but especially within the frame of the Festival days. I knew that the possibility of me being everywhere is non existing, therefore I needed to chose and reconsider wisely my position all the time. I am aware that my video material is not a full representation of the situations I was witnessing, but I was following as much as I could. I think the famous conversation between Margaret Mead and Gregory Beatson is absolutely relevant in my case.

*M: Well, what's the leaping around for?*

*B: To get what's happening.*

*M: What you think is happening.*

*B: If Stewart reached behind his back to scratch himself, I would like to be over there at that moment.*

*M: If you were over there at that moment you wouldn't see him kicking the cat under the table. So that just doesn't hold as an argument.<sup>2</sup>*

## INTERVIEWS AND FIELDWORK NOTES

*"It is not easy for most of us to approach a stranger directly and ask to talk"*

*Spradley, McCurdy*

Before entering my fieldwork, I decided to aim mostly for semi-structured interviews, leading them as a friendly chat. Nevertheless my protagonists seemed to be way more confident when dancing, or in other words - being part of a group. They were dancing, laughing, talking, but every time I was trying to ask someone for an interview they politely were avoiding the occasion. I figured out it was maybe difficult for them to relax, being alone in front of the camera. Having my informants tense was making me nervous as well. I figured out that "friendly talk" may not be the approach that will give me best results. O'Reilly states that "*Interviews can take the shape of opportunistic chats, questions that arise on the spur of the moment, one-to-one in-depth interviews, group interviews and all sorts of ways of asking questions and learning about people that fall in between.*" (O'Reilly, 2012: 5). Therefore I considered using all the possible occasions, with or without camera, with one person or many, structured or not etc. To overcome my insecurity I first turned to a dancer I was perceiving as one of the more open and talkative in the group. I tried to take as much interviews as I could - some of them felt successful, others only to a certain extent.

Following Charlotte Davis who says that "*...the researcher goes to the interview with some sort of interview schedule: it may be as structured as a set of written questions or it may be a very informal list, perhaps memorized, of topics*" (Davis, 2008: 106) I had several already selected topics, that I was always guiding my interviews towards, although

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<sup>2</sup>. For God's Sake, Margaret, Conversation with Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *CoEvolutionary Quarterly*, June 1976, 10(21), 32-44.

the process of confusion around my interviews influenced me. When discussing the eventual problems of interviewing Davis also states "...except for relatively trivial uncomplicated information, individuals are not able simply to provide uncontested knowledge about their social world."( Davis, 2008: 107) Therefore my understanding of the situations, and a great part of my empirical data was collected while occasional conversations, with no camera and no interview intention. In the present I am still in touch with most of my informants, following their lives from distance, and the development of the situations I witnessed this summer. The months after my fieldwork finished revealed many changes that I am taking in count within my study and forthcoming analysis.

As what concerns the field notes - they had a really important role for me, surprisingly from my expectations. Being on a field, participating in the action, filming with camera and following close my informants seemed to me already sufficient to collect enough ethnographic data. In the beginning my field notebook was a formality but later I started perceiving that I was having some really interesting conversations when the camera was not there. Spradley and McCurdy are stating "*One of the things that tends to make relationships with informant awkward is note taking and other means of recording information in the field*"(Spradley, McCurdy, 1972: 54). Therefore it became evident to me, that in order to preserve the precious information I am acquiring without recording tool, I must write them down. Consequently I started filling multiple pages in the end of every day, together with some of my reflections and perceptions. This was a great way to think about what I experienced within the day and note it down, without a rush. Flying back to Norway I wrote several pages in the airplane with post-field analyses I find really fruitful.

### III. FIELDWORK CONTEXT

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Welcome to Romans-sur-Isere, a remote French city 100km south from Lyon. With its 33 000 inhabitants, it is having the struggles of many small cities - decreasing economy, unemployment, lack of many opportunities for the youth. Nevertheless, the citizens of Romans are trying to sustain the cultural life with numerous festivities and events. One of the major happenings in the summer is the International Folklore Dance Festival, being held the past 38 years. The local folklore dance group Empi et Riaume is organizing this colorful event, keeping the folk traditions of the region alive (dance, music clothing, etc.). The festival makes possible a rich cultural exchange, gathering each year dance groups from all over the World - all together to perform and share their art.

The summer of 2015, I spend 2 months with the dancers and the staff of Empi et Riaume. I was present in the last month before the Festival - I had the chance to

witness the weekly rehearsals of the dancers, discovering their way of work and practice, the daily routines, preparations and progressions. As a researcher I was trying to grasp a full understanding of Empi et Riaume's activities, hence I was helping the staff with some of the organizational work concerning the upcoming Festival. My stay overlapped with a very delicate moment, as the last year the group was facing some serious difficulties in multiple aspects. One of them is an economical pressure, that directly affects the preparation for the Festival and the daily routines of the group. The financial crisis created difficult situations, and required decisions to be made. I was there in a moment of a complex situation concerning the social relations in between the group members influencing the daily ongoing and the general spirit of the group.

The second part of my fieldwork experience was dedicated to the Festival. Five days of spectacular dance performances, meeting six foreign folk dance groups from all over the world, experiencing a vast palette of emotions, facing multiple unexpected situations, observing cross-cultural interactions and witnessing many friendships occurring. This last stage was brief but certainly a strong and meaningful experience for me as a researcher. After the big event I took the decision to "go back to the source of my research project inspiration", so I spend some days with my step family in Nice, discussing and rethinking my ideas and assumptions in the light of the fresh experiences of the past weeks. Within these last days I had really important conversations with Elena and Giovanni Gulino, that spread another light over my project.

## IV. INSIDE THE ASSOCIATION - CONTRASTS OF FAMILY TIGHTS

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### THE LIFE OF EMPI ET RIAUME

The morning starts early in the office of Empi et Riaume. The building where the association exists is only a minute away from the river of Isere. It is situated in Park François Mitterrand, a small charming garden full of trees, with branches heavy from the ripe red fruits hidden among the leaves. There is a small children playground with few swings and slides. Kids laughter is combined with birds chants. Empi et Riaume is occupying the second floor of the old building. In the entrance a massive handmade mosaic is welcoming the visitors - a representation of an olive tree, with the name of the association above and a text saying "*An olive tree for peace*" below.

The first room after entering is the main office. Three desks full of documents, folders and various papers; posters of different editions of the Festival are hung on the walls, accompanied by multiple photos of festivals, travels and other events. The scent of fresh brewed coffee fills up the air. Probably one of the earliest visitors is the vice president of Empi et Riaume, Alain Champey. From Monday to Friday he comes to the office before going to work. Starting some of the daily routines, making a note of what needs to be done by the end of the day and some other controlling activities. The next person one can see is Karine, taking care of the documents, before she takes off to work in the city hospital around noon. Her daughter Léa, a young dancer in the group is helping occasionally in the office, since it is her summer school vacation. In between the morning hours multiple other staff members come and go, mostly in their spare time before or in between work. Big part of them are dancer's parents and relatives.

After the main office one can see the door of the Archives room, the room with the costumes next to it and the small kitchen. The corridor is decorated with multiple photos, prices from performances, a map of the region and many symbols of the local folklore. In the end of the corridor is the entrance to the main hall of Empi et Riaume. This room has multiple functions - it is the place to receive the guests of the group, and to give press conferences and other official events, the room where all the meetings are held, but also where the little kids play while their parents dance on rehearsals. This multi-meaningful room is rich on decoration. Big wardrobes full of headdresses are on one side, but not headdresses made for use of the dancers, the ones behind the glass are originals from a long time ago, some of them unique in their kind. Another showcase contains a dozen of puppets, all dressed with a mini version of the costumes Empi et Riaume use for their dances, so a simple look of them gives a glimpse into the clothing heritage of the region. On the other side of the room there is a vintage wooden cupboard with plates, but not a regular one - plates coming from all over the world, with the initials and the names of the visiting dance groups through the years. The next corner contains several musical instruments specific for different countries, again I assume presents from visiting the festival groups. It seems to me that there is not even a small corner in this hall which is empty. The decoration is rather symbolic, and each element is carrying a considerable significance for Empi et Riaume.

On Wednesdays the kids' rehearsal is taking place. Accompanied by the rhythm of the *vielle*<sup>3</sup> and a flute the repetition starts. It is having the form of a game - a dancer comes up with a melody and it claps its hands in rhythm. Then everyone is trying to re-create the same sequence, and the one who succeeds becomes the next to

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<sup>3</sup> Specific medieval musical instrument

imagine a new rhythm. This way of learning to follow a concrete sequence of sounds gives the young dancers a sense of a good rhythm and the capacity of paying attention of it and re-create it, something absolutely necessary in the basics of a dance. And in the whole process - they are having fun. Further in the program are the main dances, in some of them the kids are singing while dancing, as a part of the performance.

The group of the youngest dancers is not decreasing 10 kids in the present. The fact is that they were more than 20, but the school system changed - the Wednesday use to be a free of lessons day, when the kids had time for extra activities, and now as they have school all day long, the number of pupils drastically decreased. Therefore with such a change within the number, the problems didn't quite stop - it was a beginning of more consequences. Many of the boys left, leaving the remaining ones largely outnumbered by the girls. Therefore this became the reason the rest of the boys to leave - feeling alone, surrounded only by girls. In the moment I was doing my fieldwork - there was only one remaining boy in the kids section. He was referred as "a brave one", and Empi's proud.

Two days later - on Fridays is the rehearsal of the adults. It starts at 18, but many of the dancers are already there for certain time. Conversations, preparing and running around, making jokes with the others - before the rehearsal is the time for socializing. The age of the dancers is varying - but what strikes is that the communication seems to be regardless the age with no visible segregation between the different age groups. The musicians are present - the instruments are yet slightly changing - there is the vielle of course, but also an accordion. Sometimes there could be seen drums. The repetition starts with a short stretching. Then the dances are performed - each one multiple times, until the choreograph decides to continue ahead in the list of dances. Within my stay with Empi et Riaume the group was preparing for their performance at the upcoming Festival, therefore the sequence of dances rehearsed was already selected and elaborated. In between the different dances there were 5 minutes breaks, so everyone could take a breath, discuss with the others etc. While the repetition was going, sometimes some people of the staff are in the office, handling the organization of the Festival and other tasks. In the last hour there is always someone of the staff in the kitchen, preparing a dinner for everyone. While my summer stay there, this was most frequently the lady from the staff, and also a mother of one of the younger dancers. At the end of the rehearsal there is also a short stretching time, when everyone relaxes more and many jokes could be heard. Then everyone is heading towards the changing room, because the faster one changes - the faster the dinner will come. The table is already ready - several tables are united into one whole long construction. The food is in the middle, and a high tower made of plates is watching the approaching hungry people. Everyone gathers around and takes a portion. Then a big dinner starts, often filled

with laugh and intern jokes, analyze of the rehearsal, ideas about the upcoming performance and many more. Not everyone stays for dinner though, some of the dancers are leaving straight after the practice - some of them are living far, so they are not staying until late, some others have plans, but most of the staying people are connected by kin - mothers with kids, husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, brothers and sisters...

Then the weekend comes, and the halls of Empi et Riaume are quiet and empty. Monday morning everything starts all over. In the meantime, out of rehearsal and out of staff duties - all of Empi et Riaume members are having their own occupations, but many of them are passing time together out of the practice hall - connected by friendship, or family links. In the small community of Romans sur Isere, when everyone knows the others - the community life is important.

### **Family, community and belonging**

*"The important is to preserve the spirit of the group. There could be many different people coming to Empi et Riaume, but if they don't have a specific culture, a specific approach, it would be difficult I think."*

*Céline Bully  
dancer of Empi et Riaume*

The incredible devotion of the members of Empi et Riaume struck me from the very first day of my fieldwork. My curiosity was provoked by the fact that every day all these people are spending their time before or after work, giving away their spare time, vacations and sleep time absolutely voluntary, for the sake of the association. In a first place, the fact that all this work and time is volunteering, therefore not paid bend me over the idea that these people are receiving some other kind of reward, explaining their strong motivation. There should be indeed a strong reason for such a drive, and my observation led me to the following hypothesis: *a feeling of belonging*. In a matter of fact, one of the very first things one can state within Empi et Riaume is the strong relations between people - not only relations in a matter of friendship, but a real kinship tights. The group is made out of several families, whose members are either dancers, or only staff or both. Of course there are people in the association that are not a part of a family, but they are few and as far as I observed they tend to create close relations with other members, so they can be a part of the whole. The familial nature of the group was an easy to see answer, but somehow it was not enough to for me to call it an "answer". The main problem I had with accepting that "being a part of a family" will be enough reason and explanation that all of them spend their free time working for the association , was that within the frame of a kinship different members have their own free time occupations, and usually are free and willing to spend them out of the boundaries of the family life. For instance if we take one small

neighborhood, it is also a meeting point of several families, connected by sharing the same area of living, but this doesn't mean that all of the families are going to spend their free time within the frames of the neighborhood. It doesn't mean neither, that people from this families will be connected at all. I was searching for a reason that explains better how this "familial" context could be related to the situation. Was there a possibility that there is something more than just a familial tights?

Anthony P. Cohen agrees with the idea of Dore that "*Community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call 'society'*" (Cohen 1985: 15). It was evident that the people in this group are there for multiple reasons, but the feeling of belonging they have created probably was the missing element of the puzzle that explains their incredible devotion and hard work. The simple fact of sacrificing hours of sleep or family breakfast time, so they can be in the office speaks loudly about this strong connection to Empi et Riaume. Moreover this micro-community, containing multiple relatives, makes it a hybrid between a constructed community- "*a membership that means sharing with other community members 'sense of things'*" (Jenkins 2014: 139) and a simple group of families interacting together with their social world. Cohen argues that specifically within a community people can perceive the meaning and the boundaries of kinship by juxtaposing it to non-kinship and hence learn the concept of friendship. Therefore such a mixture of a community created by few kinship-related people brings up a new perspective upon the meaning of these people's belonging. I was curious to what degree their familial tights are helping or harming the dynamics of the group. These people are connecting their familial life in order to construct a bigger community within the context of the folklore. For one simple family - going through a time of change or crisis is a long and demanding process, and I was witnessing a constellation of multiple families going through this process together - which was making it even more requiring and complicated.

### **Family tights and members recruitment**

The last years were troublesome for Empi et Riaume in multiple levels - financial, personal, organizational etc. One of the most challenging aspects is the people outflow in the recent years. Before going to my fieldwork I made myself familiar with the history of the group, and while watching numerous photos and videos of their performances around the World, my idea for Empi et Riaume was of a quite big and numerous association. Entering my fieldwork greeted me with unpleasant surprise - many of the members left over the recent years, and finding newcomers was apparently a considerable challenge for the association. The group of the kids diminished severely, especially from the part of the boys. The main reason for that, as some members of the group explained to me, was that so far the

Wednesdays were school-free for the kids, but not long ago the system changed, and kids were studying in Wednesdays too. As it was a free week day before, this was the day for non-school activities for many of the kids, so placing the kids rehearsal in Wednesday afternoon was natural and efficient. Because of the change, many parents stopped bringing their kids, and the number of the dancers went quickly down. By the time I was there it was only one boy left. At a small talk with one of the young dancers, she briefly mentioned the story about her and her brother in the group.

*Me: So you don't have any family here in the group?*

*Laurence: No, and this is rare. I just came like this...well, together with my brother.*

*Me: Your brother is not dancing anymore?*

*Laurence: No. At some point there were not many boys left, and my brother was feeling all alone... I had a close friend here, so I was not that solitary, but my brother eventually left. I wanted to convince him to come back, but unsuccessfully.*

Laurence is one of the few members in Empi et Riaume who were not previously connected with the association via family links. She saw a performance and decided to join. The story of her brother's leaving because of the lack of other boys though is significant. Apparently not only kinship is holding the members together. Boys need to have other boys around, especially in the kids section, where the dancers are young and the need of a concrete social milieu is particularly elevated. Young boys ( here I need to precise that the average age of the kid's section is 8 to 13 years) seem to be not comfortable enough to dance within a group only composed by girls. Here I suggest that the notion of a social identity building is having a great role. Especially within the young age, and later in the teenage years, kids are strongly sensible for what concerns their identity. Richard Jenkins argues in his book *Social Identity* that "*identification, whether of ourselves or of others is a process*"(Jenkins ,2014:2) In the early years it is somehow highlighted what others are doing, and for the case of Empi et Riaume it gets explicit that boys stick with boys, and girls stick with girls, especially when it comes to recruiting new members.

*Céline: However now it's more difficult to make boys dance.*

*Alain: Well, there is a big choice of things a boy can do these days. It's normally one boy who brings another, who brings a third one.. that's how it usually works... Otherwise it's difficult to force or convince somebody all alone. It works like a snow ball that grows by itself while rolling in the snowflakes.*

The recruitment problem was affecting the adults as well, where the number of the men dancing was not enough, compared to the number of female dancers. The overall picture was not optimistic, having in mind that the general number of dancers was continuously shrinking. In a conversation with the vice president of the



group Alain Champey he revealed that he personally tried to talk with some of the old members and convince them come back. Several of them came back, brought by one or another reason. One of these attempts worked out particularly well, and brought back not one but four members at the same time. Alain called his close friend Céline to talk about an eventual return possibility. Céline was a member of Empi et Riaume from her early childhood years, more precisely -from the age of 6. She married Bernard - a member of another folk group at that time and they became parents of two boys. The family moved an hour away from Romans-sur-Isere, and being a part of Empi became time consuming and inconvenient for two parents, who eventually left the group. One day Alain called, and Céline and Bernard decided to give it a try, as the dance repetitions were only once a week - at Friday night. Here I need to precise that Bernard was accordionist of the group for several years, while his wife has always been a dancer. Since they started going to repetitions, with them was also traveling their youngest son Robin. Céline explained to me an interesting story of how the whole family started to come together.

*"We were coming the tree of us, while our oldest son Mathieu was having a basketball practice. At some point he asked to join us and chose being in Empi over practicing basketball. Now every Friday we take the car, we drive for an hour to be there, we practice together, then have a dinner with the group members and we go back home pretty late, but we are all together you know."*

While I was there in the summer, the two young boys were helping their father, and were playing the drums, becoming a part of the musicians. They were a considerable help for the Empi et Riaume performance on stage at the Festival. Nevertheless I was observing the younger boy - Robin, dancing around while the repetition. I once asked him if he don't want to join the dancers. He looked at me and said " No, I mean.. I don't know.. " in a very shy way, with his childish uncertainty. Certainly he knew that there are not much boys at his age in the group. Nevertheless he really seemed interested. It was easy to perceive the hesitation and the dilemma in his mind. Several weeks later I was speaking with Pierrette, the costume maker of the group and she mentioned suddenly:

*"I heard lately that Robin got really interested, so he can maybe really join Empi. With the youngsters - there is no need to push up things, better let things happen naturally."*

I guess that finally the young boy decided that his interest is bigger than the shyness, and as far as his family is also there, he felt somehow braver to try and join the dancers.

He was not the only example of a boy that wants to come to the group this summer. Karene is a dancer, whose two daughters are part of the kids section too. In a small talk with her, she told me that she has 4 kids, but only the two daughters are currently dancing. Her older son use to dance for a while but he left. Yet her younger son is thinking of joining the group, so she was hoping that the older one will

reconsider as well. Many of the parents were seeing their kids as a potential dancers, somehow naturally. And as they were bringing them to the rehearsals, for many of the kids being part of Empi was becoming natural as well, so the continuity of the group recruiting was mainly done thanks to kinship.

While I was staying with Empi et Riaume, there was only one boy currently dancing with the kids . When I asked about him the answer I received was "*He is a true little hero here, coping with all the ladies, and remaining with us so far!*". The boy was the son of one of the adult dancers though, which made me question his presence in the group. It seemed that he had already found something else that makes him stay in the dance group, even though he is the only boy in the kids section. Was it possible that his kinship relation was stronger, than the idea of "social perception" that makes the other boys go away so soon? My curiosity was thrilled by the idea of finding out what kind of bond is the one that makes people come, or stay, and eventually bring new people. Was it that family relations bond people in the association, or the feeling of group/community belonging straightens their family links? Jenkins reflects upon the idea of "group" as a "social construction", he states: "*To invoke the first principle of social constructionism, groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They realize it.*" (Jenkins, 2014: 13). Jenkins suggests that people create their "groups" consciously and on purpose. Of course that Empi et Riaume is an association where people enter consciously, and it is having concrete borders and regulations, but this not answer to the feeling of belonging, which is not a phenomenon that could happen only by joining the dance group and participating in the rehearsals. In "The Symbolic Construction of Community" Anthony Cohen looks upon this phenomenon from slightly different perspective. He states that "*<...> we can speak of the community as a symbolic, rather than a structural, construct.*" and he adds "*Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of 'fact'*" (Cohen, 1989: 98). So far I agree that for what it comes to Empi et Riaume, there was something deeper than just the title of *member* of the group. People seemed to be deeply connected one with another, and it looked like they are creating a micro-cosmos within this association, that represents one big family, connected by several families and different types of symbolic actions and connections. The process is not one sided - it is neither only a family connection that brings in people there together, nor only the group feeling that creates bonds - the process is from both of the sides and it creates a self fulfilling circle that generates the specific milieu within Empi et Riaume.

## EVERYDAY RITUALS

What is Empi et Riaume? The first and most easy answer I had when explaining where I am spending my summer was "A folklore and dance association in a small French town". Being there for several months reviled how shallow my answer was. As I already mentioned, this micro-cosmic community has a strongly developed sense of belonging and specific intern rules. It became within the years some kind of a family activity, and of some sort one big family, but also a milieu that creates new families too. Many times when I was there, different people were referring to the group as a "marriage agency" with a smile and a wink. The state of Empi et Riaume is rather specific, as I have been told that not many folklore dance groups are so deeply family involved. My intense desire was to know what keeps all this constellation of relations up together.

Connected to the conservation of the family paradigm, Reiss explains that the two main actors are the *Ceremonials* and the *Pattern regulators*. I am willing to connect his family studies directly to the state of the dance group, since I already stated the familial shape this small community has. Reiss considers the "ceremonials" as a core behavior - they are charged with feeling, symbolic, episodic and requiring the participation of the whole "family" actions. The Pattern regulators is therefore the peripheral behavior - the routine everyday actions. As for what concerns Empi -the pattern regulators were easy to state. All the office work, the small cleaning routines, managing the headquarters and other everyday activities, who are a part of the group life were the obvious pattern regulators. These activities are a must have, an integral part of the life of the association, but they are not sufficient to build deep links among the members. My concern was to identify the *Ceremonials* of Empi et Riaume, so I could better understand the nature and occurrence of their bonds. David Reiss explains his vision upon the Ceremonials this way "*When they are fully organized, conspicuous, and highly stable over time - may be called family rituals.*" (Reiss, 1981; 229) In this context let's connect the idea of *Ceremonials* with Cohen's idea of *Rituals* as a way of experiencing a community. The British social anthropologist approaches it in an intriguing way: "*Although ritual, as a topic, brings out all the paradigmatic diversity and sectarianism of anthropology as a discipline, most exponents would agree that both in its social and psychological consequences, ritual confirms and strengthens social identity and people's sense of social location; it is an important means through which people experience community.*"(Cohen, 1989; 50) What for Reiss is ceremonials within a family life, could be described also as rituals within the community life. Speaking about social constructivism and applying the idea that reality is constructed through human activity, it could be said that the social reality within Empi et Riaume micro society is definitely constructed through members activity - specifically rituals connecting them together.

## After practice dinner

Empi et Riaume was becoming smaller and smaller within the past years. Perceiving the decrease, naturally people started to search for a solution, or some way of keeping everything from falling apart. Eventually the remaining members started gathering together after practice, which is approximately at 22-23h every Friday, and having a dinner all together in the main hall of Empi headquarters. While the dance repetition goes, there is someone cooking a big meal in the kitchen just right beside the rehearsal hall, and by the time everyone changes in normal clothes, the table in the main hall is set. Not everyone stays, however a huge part of them do. Pierrette, the costume maker of Empi explained to me:

*"There is a sag in the group, and we try to recreate something with the after practice dinner. Nobody is obliged to stay of course. When we saw the lack of team we decided to recreate a link between the families that come here. Precisely with this dinner we create a sort of a big family. There is a stronger connection. You can see that we all laugh well and so on... That's what we needed to recreate, because there was perhaps a big generational gap. Between the married adults, who had already grandchildren, and the young 15 years old teenagers - there was some sort of a distance. Now it is going better, we are happier with how it is going in the repetition hall these days..."*

The dinner was a curious gathering for me to observe. Everyone was helping for the setting of the food, but it was more of a youngsters task to put everything in place. Then everyone gathers and sits around the table. In my eyes it was somehow logical that people sit in the same corner with the rest of their actual family members, but this was not the case, as people were mixing their sits, and it seemed that there was no concrete rule who is sitting with whom. The main role of a dinner might seem to be related to the food, and the process of eating, but this would require people finishing briefly their dish and going home. The case of Empi et Riaume was the exact opposite - people were most of the time talking and the conversations were switching from commenting the past rehearsal, through some interesting and funny stories of the past of the group, towards some future projects etc. Sometimes the dinner was almost longer than the repetition itself. Analyzing the nature of familial rituals, Reiss explains that *"Each member feels engaged in something larger than himself. Blended together is a shared subjective sense of the extensivity of the family <...>"* (Reiss, 1981; 232) Therefore applying this idea to the concrete example of the after practice dinner, it is possible to observe, that gathering together all dancers and staff is creating to some extent a whole, that hovers in between the group's past, present and future - through anecdotes, jokes, plans and discussions. There are no singular members, there is one whole - Empi et Riaume. When within the practice time it is not advised for

people to talk much and the most important thing is to pay attention to the repetition itself, and the 5 minutes of break are a time when people have time to joke around, but are insufficient for deeper conversations (because of their brief nature), the dinner is somehow a natural continuity of dancers socializing. The simple fact that the dance group recreates in a way a "family" dinner shows how their feeling of attachment to this idea of family feeling is a leading one. The after practice dinner is undoubtedly a component of the group paradigm. It encompasses and symbolizes the need of communication on a different level of the dance, and from what people of the group are expressing - it tightens their connections and bonds the generations and all the families and members all together successfully.

### Photos on the wall

In every home there could be found at least one photo of the family or some of the family members, hanging on the wall, or carefully put in a frame on a shelf.

"One of the most important purposes of photography is to preserve "in the archives of our memory" all "precious things whose form will disappear." Baudelaire's metaphor used here is that of the photographic archive as global memory, a potential store-house of the knowledge accumulated by mankind." states Teodora Cosman in her article "The Metaphors of Photography and the Metaphors of Memory- Artistic Reflections on an Album of Family Photographs -". The walls in Empi et Riaume headquarters are a patchwork of photographs, preserving multiple precious things, or rather moments. There is not one specific place of exposition - the Empi et Riaume photos are put on display in almost every corner- in the rehearsal hall, in the office, in the costume room, in the main hall, in the corridor... For a first time visitor all the images of dancers in different locations is quite of an overwhelming. They are a lot and they are everywhere. In his book *Camera Lucida*, the French theorist Roland Barthes describes the photographs as a "certificate of presence" that help experiencing time as a "singular and non-repeatable event". Empi et Riaume has multiple different decorations in their headquarters, but not all of them are being shown such as big interest as the photographs. They seem to one of the most significant part in the building. It is usual to see people watching at the photos together, youngsters point their fingers to some festival photo and ask some adult dancer: "Oh, is that you there? Where is that? Where is my mom on this one?" etc. Some of the older dancers gather in front of them and share some memories of the old times:

-Do you remember this trip? I was there too... here I am!

-Where? Is THAT you? You look so funny on this one!

- This is because he has a ponytail!

-Aaah, it was half of a pony tail...

Others are discussing marriages, and people still in the group, what happened with one or another member of Empi since he left years ago. The photos

are a easy conversation starter, and often a reason of the adult dancers to show the young ones "how it was years ago", to show them their relatives back in the days and to share happily some old memory. In this manner the generation gap was temporally disappearing, or at least it was a way of connection and bridges building. Everyone in the association is very attached to the photos, even if they are not on them. When I was having conversation with different dancers and staff members, the photos were a big source of proud, not only a "*certificate of presence*" but a very significant certificate of belonging. In many and different conversations people proudly showed me the photos, or were referring to them, as a mark that they knew this moment, they were there or their relatives. The value of these photographs is extremely big. Barthes states that "*The Photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been. <...> No writing can give me this certainty.*" (Barthes; 1981; chapter 34 of Camera Lucida) Empi et Riaume members are absolutely conscious about the difference between the times of the photos, and the current reality of the association. Therefore these printed pieces of paper were as a reminder of what could it be, and they contain the history of the group in a very gently explicit way. It is true that the archives of the folklore group are full of the history, attentively ranged and documented, but they were never of such an interest as the photos. The texts in the archives are concrete facts, selected and stated black on white. Differently, the photographs are images open to be analyzed and understood differently from everyone. They are not a simple decoration of the rooms, but a significant part of the life of the group, and a tool of connection between the members, and especially between the generations, conserving the group paradigm.

### **Dance travels**

When speaking about something that bond up the members of the group, very often people are mentioning the travels out of the city, and especially out of France. Multiple researches are being conducted in a search of prove that traveling creates bonds. It is no secret that travel is enriching experience, and rests often as a highlight of people's memories. In the article "Family and Relationship Benefits of Travel Experiences: A Literature Review" A. Durko and J. Petrick describe that "*These shared activities by family members can create a unique experience that leads to an increase in bonding and attachment. This can lead to children learning to share and getting along better with others, as well as creating loyalty within the family*". The existing difference is that firstly- here we speak of not a family traveling, but a whole group travel; and secondly - not about a simple touristic trip or a vacation, but a travel with performance purpose that requires a specific responsibility of the travelers.

Being able to travel use to be one of the main and most appealing sides while recruiting new members for the dance group. This is relevant not only for Empi et Riaume, but for many more folklore groups. Years ago, when traveling abroad was

not that accessible as nowadays, because of money reasons, or political regime etc., being a part of a folklore dance group meant at least one sure travel out of the country per year. This was enough reason for many young people to go towards the dance hall. Of course this had changed and these days going abroad is easier for a bigger part of the population. The chance of going somewhere together with the dance group doesn't seem so unique as the previous years. Pierrette, who has many years of observation within Empi et Riaume explains:

*"All of the old dancers have multiple travel anecdotes to tell, but the ones that can make you cry out of laughing. Today the young ones are much more difficult to please, and this is a pity because they can't appreciate the true value of the travels. "*

Maybe today "being able to travel" is not the first thing that attracts the youth to join the folklore group, but just a part of the whole. Many of them were still expressing sadness that they travel less these last years, because of the money problems of the group. Yet traveling stories could be heard even from the youngest, who were gladly and with proud pointing towards the photos and telling me where they have been.

The biggest part of the anecdotes and the stories told around the dinner table in the association are related to the travels. Some of them were fascinating with things seen, activities done, different nations met and multiple cultures touched. While discussing different Empi et Riaume tours I started noticing an element, very often present within these stories - the creation of connections among the dancers themselves. While one of the after practice dinners I was talking with Celine and Alain, who were reflecting upon the travels and the numerous couples who got married within the dance group.

*Celine: Actually I think that when you travel, you start to know really well the person besides you.*

*Alain: To live together 24h/24h*

*Celine: 24h/24h - you start to perceive the character of the person, so you take smaller risks, compared if you go for someone from the outside. It's true!*

They stated that travels are showing the true colors of each person, and they both agreed that this is indeed a powerful way of testing the personality of the different people, which leads to a certain security in case of choosing someone for a partner. In the multiple researches made about the benefits of the traveling within a family, multiple thesis are exploited: the connection between travel and family bonds, overall happiness, togetherness, family satisfaction etc. In what concern Empi et Riaume - there was another side of the benefits - the creation of relationship connections and friendships in a first place. Sharing experiences undoubtedly

creates ties among people, and the love stories, started around a traveling are multiple in the chronicles of the group.

# TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS. DEALING WITH CRISIS

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## FACTORS FROM INSIDE THE GROUP

Human relations are a vast mixture of ups and downs; disagreements and conflicts are ever present part of the human experience. Compromise and willingness to resolve the problem are usually expected to be reached. However talking about a group of people, where multiple sides and opinions are interfering one another, a conflict has the potential to become much more complicated and difficult to be dealt with. The bigger the conflict group is - the highest number of personal opinions, i.e. personal values are being confronted. Ásthildur Elva Bernhardsdóttir explores the conflict within groups of people in her book "Crisis-Related Decision-Making and the Influence of Culture on the Behavior of Decision Makers", where she states that especially when it comes to deeply-held values "*The conflict can eventually become a serious obstacle in the decision making process and develop into a crisis of its own.*"(Bernhardsdóttir, 2015;69). Instability of a group dynamics is a part of a natural cycle, where some problem arises, followed by conflict, instability, eventual change of the group paradigm and restoring of the stable state. This circle is of course ever-turning. Kenwyn K. Smith and David N. Berg argue that the group life is inherently paradoxical, along with all other group nature facets. They claim that this paradoxical nature "*needs to be understood alongside the other aspects of group life*" and instead of "*resolving*" conflicts there should be searched ways of "*releasing*" them. (Smith, Berg, 1987;634) In this chapter I will examine the complex cluster of conflict situations within the group of Empi et Riaume, in a first place considering the factors emerging from inside the association, and later the occurring outside factors. My aim is not only to list and explain the conflict circumstances, but to grasp the mechanisms that Empi et Riaume created in order of overcoming the times of crisis. Following the idea that a "*family's problem-solving style <...> is a direct consequence of the family's typical approach to constructing its social world*" (Reiss, 1981; 78) I intent to connect the problem-solving style of Empi et Riaume with their specific social reality, constructed within the group.

### Group dynamics in trouble



The few months I spend in Empi et Riaume were hectic and filled with insecurities and looming problems. I had a very strategic place in the whole process, as an outside and neutral spectator, who happened to have observations of each side of the conflicts and to be able to distinguish their particularities. Smith and Berg state that the nature of a group is to satisfy both the needs of its individual members and the needs of the collectivity, therefore as interdependencies occur, "*members come to depend on the group and the group comes to depend on its members, triggering a wide range of emotional reactions, both conscious and unconscious, that often are experienced as conflicting and divergent.*" (Smith, Berg, 1987;635) The interpersonal tensions between the members of Empi et Riaume were often emerging, while some of them were explicit and straightforwardly developing, and others were occurring quietly.

When I arrived in Empi et Riaume, it was the last weeks before the festival, there was no secretary anymore, they changed the choreographer of the group not long time ago, the president of the association was temporary chosen person, so there is a president, and the inside atmosphere was charged with tension. All the stories about love, friendships and bonding seemed to me very far away from this reality. At least in the beginning. The contrast between this anxious reality of theirs and all the stories of love and understanding I had in my mind was tremendous, and I was feeling very lost, because none of my expectations for this group of people seemed to be true. Donelson Forsyth treats the topic of group dynamics and explains that when there is a conflict "*Members stand against each other rather than in support of each other*" (Forsyth, 2006;411) As far as it goes to Empi et Riaume - as it is quite a small association, within a disagreement people simply started leaving, instead of confronting opinions in a matter of finding a consensus. With my arrival I was only listening to remaining stories of escalated feelings, and I was able to judge the situation only by the small information coming to me. Nevertheless Within the whole chaotic situation I gathered multiple points of view from different sides, that made me think of my own explanation of the situation. It was undoubtedly a hectic moment in the association, but my stare was chasing the initial reason of this dissonance.

### **The presidency of Empi et Riaume**

*"Leadership binds together the leader and the follower, the coach and the team, the manager and the staff, and the president and the citizenry in n interface that can fundamentally shape the group's future."*

*D. Forsyth*

Being a president of a folklore association is a position related with many responsibilities and expectations from the side of all the members. When Empi et

Riaume was created, the mother of the group - Miss Madeleine Bouvier was naturally being called the president of the group. She remained in her position for several decades, until her very last day in 1982. The name of Miss Bouvier is still whispered in Empi et Riaume with an extraordinary respect and admiration. Her strong personality left a powerful mark. If we take a look within the archives of the presidency position, we can see the following names.

<i>Marie Madeleine Bouvier</i>	1933-	1982
<i>Christian Michon</i>	1983-	1988
<i>Marie Noelle Morin</i>	1989-	1990
<i>Jean Marie Larat</i>	1991-	1992
<i>Christian Michon</i>	1993-	1996
<i>Anne Marie Ciolfi</i>	1996-	2014
<i>Frédéric Bonnard</i>	2014-	2015

It is easy to be seen, that after the leadership of Miss Bouvier for more than 40 years, Empi et Riaume was having trouble keeping a single president for more than a few years. Multiple people coming changed on the leader position, none of them lasting. The second biggest name in the presidency history of the association came in 1996. Her name is Anne Marie Ciolfi. She started as a dancer in her early teenage years and in 1996 she became president of the group. She remained on that position for the remarkable 18 years, until 2014. As a leader - she created multiple connections with other folklore groups, associations and organizations all around the world. In the time of her presidency, the Festival organized by Empi et Riaume is labeled by CIOFF France, and 4 years later in 2006 the group itself becomes part of this organization. In 2012 Ciolfi was also elected president of CIOFF France. Anne Marie Ciolfi expanded the Festival considerably. When she started her presidency the event was held for 3 days. Gradually the event grew bigger and stronger. The expansion of the International Festival in Romans-sur-Isere while the presidency of Ciolfi can be seen in the archives:

1996, 1997- 3 days;  
 1998- 4 days;  
 1999- 6 days;  
 2000 - 7 days;  
 2001, 2002, 2003- 8 days;  
 2004-11 days  
 2005, 2006- 9 days  
 2007, 2008- 10 days  
 2009, 2010- 9 days  
 2011, 2012- 10 days  
 2013 - 9 days  
 2014- 5 days

Empi et Riaume became a family for Anne-Marie, but her family also became part of the group. Her ex-partner Guillaume Dal Capello use to be a dancer, yet in the present days is singing while the group is performing on stage. Their son Vincent Dal Capello is also strongly connected with the life in Empi et Riaume, as dancer, accordion player and a choreograph for multiple years. Unfortunately in the beginning of 2014 Anne-Marie experienced severe health issues, so she had to leave her presidency position, and recover.

The upcoming 2 years were a slow and continuous fight for the association to remain stable and to deal with the upcoming challenges. After the incident with Anne-Marie health, the group board had to make quick decisions and elect a new president. So far no one was ready to take over the leadership position and the threat of conflicts and disagreement overshadowed Empi. Then the former Vice-president Frédéric Bonnard took the post. Not because of a big desire to be a president, but uniquely because of feeling of duty, as multiple members saw in him a stable enough figure. Anne Marie Ciolfi mentioned that she asked him to take the position at least as a beginning, because the group was in need of someone who can preserve the stability and integrality as far as possible.

Frédéric Bonnard, or as I knew him - Fred, is an extremely friendly and honest gentleman, who is part of Empi et Riaume for many years as a dancer and board member. His high morality was maybe the quality that made him so reliable, but he never seemed to love his leadership position more than that. Forsyth claims that leaders do influence their groups, however he explains that "*Leadership is not the power to coerce others, an inborn trait, a necessity of group life, or a mysterious capacity to heal sick groups. Instead leadership is the process by which an individual guides others in their pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting and motivating their efforts.*" (Forsyth, 2006;376) The position of a leader seem to have a very particular meaning within the context of keeping the group functioning properly and guiding its general direction. The sudden and unexpected change in Empi et Riaume's structure indeed affected its cohesion and stability.

Observing the archive data, it could be seen the pattern of one long-lasting leader who establishes a certain order to the group, followed by several years of multiple persons changing, and then the next big leader who re-establishes a new way of being. After the loss of a big leader, such as Anne Marie Ciolfi, without a well established head of the group, many things became vulnerable to change.

Change is an inevitable part of the society's life. The remaining question is if it is for good or not. It is true that a strong leader has the power of conducting things towards one direction, and bending the group reality according one's own understanding. Once without a strong leader, people in Empi et Riaume started having diverse ideas and positions about how things need to be. Victor Turner explores the social drama within societies, arguing that it is a "*well-nigh universal*

*processual form and represents a perpetual challenge to all aspirations to perfection in social and political organization.*"(Turner, 1980; 152). In this context, is it possible that these times of deviation and change become beneficial for the group?

### **The choreographer position**

*"Aesthetic judgments are basically the set of rules a culture has that bind artistic activity. Creativity involves an intimate knowledge of those rules so that one may then bend them, disregard them momentarily, and break them - all within cultural limits."*

*Anya Peterson Royce*

Being a choreographer in Empi et Riaume is not an easy task. The group has a vast heritage which is deeply attached to. Adapting dances in a new composition every year is occasion for many disputes - staying loyal to the original traditional form or shape it in a new way. The integrity of the dance form and the "mise-en scene", the right way of performing and the knowledge of each step and gesture are a concern for every person who takes the choreographer position. The final product of each performance depends on the vision of the choreographer. Being conservative or pro-innovative means a lot within the context of a folklore, where the relation between tradition and modern interpretation is really fragile. There are opinions that a folklore should stick closely to its initial form - should always be consulted by the old books and transcriptions in the archive, and remain stable. An alternative opinion is that each art, including the dance - as a bodily performance- is going through the prism of the personal perception of the individual performing it, and the state of the collectivity (if we talk about a dance group). In the end, the choreographer and the dancer are not the only sides who have a word in the process, as A. Royce states "*Audience expectation and preparation are crucial in determining how innovative a work can be.*" (Royce, 2004; 187) Empi et Riaume had multiple choreographers coming and going away. By the time I was their guest I witnessed one of the last changes within this position of the choreographer.

Vincent Dal Capello is the son of Anne Marie Ciolfi. From his very early childhood, at the age of 8, he became part of Empi et Riaume - at first as a dancer. His whole childhood, teenager period and his twenties were dedicated almost fully to the folklore and especially to the group, that marked strongly his life. His passion for accordion playing grew bigger, and he became the accordion player of the group. The last 6 years he was having the position of main choreographer, which was a long lasting position. Vincent is 31 years old, and as a young dancer he has a rather creative and inventive vision of a dance. Taking care of the right way of dancing, adapting the dances for the stage and selecting a program for Empi et Riaume's

performances is connected with the idea of creation and interpretation. The vision of Vincent about adaptation and interpretation of the dances was occasionally a subject of disagreements within the group members. Many of them were discontent with the idea of a change, and holding strongly upon following strictly the initial dance form.

Few months before my arrival in Romans-sur-Isere, Vincent was removed from his choreograph position, with the explanation of him missing 3 repetitions. He didn't had the chance to defend his absence or give an explanation, as the decision was made after a brief meeting of the board members, without his knowledge. It was announced to him post factum, and it got him by surprise. This of course concluded with unpleasant situations and hard feelings from the both sides, and Vincent left Empi et Riaume with a feeling of depreciation.

Changing the choreographer that held the position for the 6 past years is a big occurrence. Undoubtedly there could be risen questions and presumptions about the connection of the boy being choreographer for so long and his mother's position as a leader of the group, and the fact that his dismissing happened soon after Anne-Marie was not a president of the group anymore. If there is some connection between these events, it surely shows one thing - the ongoing hierarchical change give the opportunity a whole new range of changes inside the group. Yet the question is not how is this happening, but what is the result of it?

The next person who took the choreographer position is Thiffany Barruyer. Her mother is a member of the board and her sister is dancing in the kids section. Thiffany is also a member of Empi et Riaume for several years, and few years ago she switched from the kids section to the adults. I was having the chance to observe the manner of leading of Thiffany. She was being often helped by other fellow dancers, who were giving their opinion about how a gesture should be done, what is the right tempo etc. Her rehearsals were accompanied by dancers having time to laugh, joke and have fun around, while rehearsing. The atmosphere was much more loose and the practice was more a time to dance and have fun together, rather the strict, disciplined ambience of a professional dance preparation. My attention was caught, when in a moment of the 5 minutes the break of the rehearsal, there was a discussion concerning how the dancers should "act" performing a concrete dance, and why.

*Dancer P. -They could sweat as much as they want, but they need to make more "play".*

*Choreographer - Yes, that's right. Therefore the scenic play starts to come up. Especially within the "La dérobée" (The stolen one)\*, you really need to Bring it on! Girls, you should look furious, you don't want to, you pull your heads, you talk among you "you bet!" ...*

*Dancer F. -No, but we will have them, we will have them!*

Choreographer *-Here, and the same when you are in a circle, and they pull your skirts, you must not laugh, you must really.. you must really act mean.*

....

Choreographer *-You need to scream, and those who are in the first rolls, they will hear. Even though not everyone will hear, there will be those 2-3 persons who Will laugh. So you girls scream "Aaah!" and boys - make big gestures! You really need to bring it on, it is a stage play...*

This short moment reveals, how the understanding of the specific story of a dance is primary for the correct performance of it. While the dancers are not aware of the meaning behind it, their gestures and even their expression or the scenic play couldn't be accurate. The girls were smiling, before they were been told they need to "act angrily", which is absolutely normal, having in mind that smile is of a great importance on the stage. Therefore, the efforts of the choreographer and the other members of the group to explain how and why they need to act in a certain way is extremely significant. Transmitting the right message trough a dance is only possible if the dancer understands it fully. In connection, it is interesting to be said, that the archivist of the group was expressing her disappointment, that dancers are not interested enough in searching and learning the roots of each dance, consulting the archives of the group. The position of Thiffany was not long lasting, as few months after the Festival she let go her position.

The position took an old member of the group, recently came back to Empi et Riaume, who has a stable knowledge about the history of the dance and the foundation of the dance heritage. The choreography of the group remains under constant change of style and guidance. The former leader of Empi et Riaume Anne Marie Ciolfi, who has a vast knowledge and observations upon the folklore dance scene in France and around the world argues that choreography of folklore is incredibly complex work. There are several very important aspects that are essential to be considered in order to create a correct performance. She separates these features in tree main categories:

1. *The pedagogy of the dance - Dancers need to know the base of the dance, yet not only perform certain movements, but they need to have the understanding of what are they executing and its meaning and function. Also it is important to perform not only with body movements, but with eyes and gests.*

2. *The mise en scene of the dance - The choreography needs to be pursuant with the features of the stage, the sound and the lightening. Originally the folklore dances were performed in the everyday life- on the field, in the backyard or on the street, so they are not initially thought as something that should consider a stage etc. Therefore a certain adaptation should be done, so the performance could be optimal with the specific artistic display.*

3. *The creation of the dance - The choreographer needs to absorb the first and the second aspects, and from this point being able to create a new universe in the dance level. All that was transmitted to him should be refracted and interpreted by the prism of his spirit, and the groups soul too. There is an inevitable difference between the same dances being danced 100 years ago and nowadays.*

In her book "The Anthropology of Dance" the American anthropologist Anya Royce states 8 aspects of the dance, that are important to the "survival potential of different kinds of dance" through time changing conditions and circumstances.

1. *Flexibility in the sense of serving more than one function.*
2. *Flexibility in the sense of not being tied exclusively to any one institution.*
3. *Flexibility in the sense of not being limited to a small elite either in terms of performance or observance.*
4. *A number of links with other aspects of culture.*
5. *A structure that allows for improvisation and modification.*
6. *Attributes that make it entertaining or potentially marketable.*
7. *Potential for marking identity in situations of contact.*
8. *The ability of change from being a recreational dance form to one for formal occasions and vice versa. (Royce, 2002; 110)*

The opinions of the two women are treating different case - one is related to the consideration of a folklore dance as a "correct" and "competent" one, as the second opinion is treating the quality of a dance to remain and preserve itself through time. Nevertheless there can be seen clearly connections between the 3 points stated by Ciolfi and the 8 points stated by Royce.

Flexibility and interpretation seem to go hand by hand and are needed in both cases, as Royce claims multiple aspects of flexibility as needed. Therefore the discontent of the group members about the attempts of the former choreographer Vincent Dal Capello to modify the dances in new ways could be seen as a signal of their determination to keep the initial form of something, without considering any possible flexibility. My interest was to find the possible reason for this behavior. The members of the group are being known for being deeply attached to their heritage, especially since they collected it through years by themselves. The costume maker of Empi et Riaume explains to me that the Valley of Rhone (the valley in which Roman-sur-Iserre is situated) used to be a thoroughfare back in the years, and therefore the local population had way more difficult times preserving their local regional traditions, compared to more closed regions with less change happening. The comprehension of the dual nature of folklore traditions is a rather complex process. There is nevertheless the aspect of "the purpose" that Empi et Riaume dancers see

behind their activity- is it a familial activity that helps members of the family to bond, is it an urge of knowing and preserving their local heritage and culture, is it a way of being artists and connect with the audience and other folklore groups or something else? It may be even a mixture of all these ideas, but the answer could explain the changing rhythm of the group.

## **FINANCIAL CRISIS AND EXTERNAL FACTORS**

### **Loss of subventions for the Festival**

Over the last years France is slowly changing its politics towards the culture. The subventions for many culture-related associations and establishments became deficit and are dropping down, making the organization of multiple events harder than ever. It is easy to see it even by a simple visit of a museum, that use to be free entrance and suddenly became paid and expensive. I am not willing to analyze the French politics deeply in this paper, as the political decisions are often too complex and deep-rooted. My aim in this chapter is to connect the current political situation with the problems that Empi et Riaume is encountering. I aim to explicit the way their social reality is affected by diverse problems, and how they are trying to cope with the changes.

While discussing with the archivist of the group - Giselle, I have been told that for the past several years Empi et Riaume was not able to create their usual annual Gala performance. The reason was that the Concert hall that always have been their scene for the Galas declared a really high price for the rent of the building, and Empi et Riaume had to consider making the Gala with an entering price, which was against their will. Eventually with the outflow of the dancers and the money difficulties, they simply stopped making Galas, at least temporally. This was one of the mechanisms of promoting the group and recruiting new members. The lack of Gala concerts unfortunately creates a significant extra difficulty for Empi et Riaume's continuity and member-searching. The group is holding to the idea of a free entrance, and stands their ground with the opinion that making people pay to see their galas is pointless, and won't result well.

Consequently the group who has always been active in the multiple towns in the region, is still trying to remain active. Having regular or at least frequent performances in the region is building the image of Empi et Riaume and therefore making the group stronger and prominent. The financial difficulty of the French town halls is marking these events too, creating a new obstacle for Empi et Riaume. Pierrette Bertrand explains:

*"Unfortunately the small villages around don't have enough money to receive us. We use to have many demands for small performances, but now there are only few of them*



*remaining. It happens sometimes that we send them the contract of performance, and they write us back, that they are deeply sorry, and after a meeting about finances they cannot receive us - not because they don't want to, but because they don't have the financial possibility to do so."*

The barrier of being on stage is a significant one. The true purpose of a dance group is to dance, not only for itself, but to dance and this way to connect with the audience, to transmit that audience all the values and meaning of the dance. To be able to touch the audience is extremely important for the life of a dance group, no matter folklore or other type of dance. In this case is it relevant to treat the hardship to find a way to perform as a crisis?

As the costume maker of Empi et Riaume Pierrette Bertrand named it, now without the Gala concerts, the Festival is "*the highlight*" of the year for Empi et Riaume. A vast part of their efforts are now focused on the organization of this event. It became one of the few remaining ways to gather a large audience and to promote their activity. Few years ago nonetheless, the subventions coming from the Romans-sur-Isere town hall dropped down drastically. They received 35 000 euro less than usual, and the town hall fusion them with another international manifestation. This implied that Empi et Riaume shared subventions with other organizations, therefore the budget decisions were taken from 3 different sides. Consequently the International Folklore Festival became much more difficult to organize moneywise. If we go back to the archives, we can notice that in 2014 the length of the festival suddenly reduced two times, and became only 5 days. In 2015 Empi et Riaume lost one of their big sponsors too, consequently they decided to reduce the number of the guest groups. The association decided not to raise up the ticket prices, in order to keep the number of people coming to the event stable. Therefore volunteer work became a major force in the organization of the event, as the help of some local businesses sponsoring. The program became much more tight, but with the help of the group followers and supporters - it continues existing. The association was aware that the International Festival is one of the last remaining annual activities, and as such its existence became a big part of their efforts. The group faced great pressure, and dealing with it was not always easy. Thanks to the big efforts they put, the outcome of the Festival in 2015 was balanced finances, that made the organization of the Festival in 2016 possible. Empi et Riaume look with hope and ambition towards 2017, when the 40th issue of the Festival should be held.

### **Removing the secretary position**

Empi et Riaume is an association, running on volunteer work. The only ever paid position in the group was the one of the secretary. For the past 10 years this post was taken by Véronique Cuvato. Within the years of her work she created multiple

links with the city, a network of volunteers, sponsors and friends of the group and the Festival.

This year, just a month before the Festival, Véronique had to be dismissed, because of the financial issues Empi et Riaume was facing. Firing their secretary was a difficult decision, that echoed within the association. Expressing their regret and unhappiness were many members, but also people from outside Empi et Riaume. I met Veronique only once, but her name was often mentioned, and the unfortunate situation was largely discussed. She was mastering the organization of the Festival for a decade, and I rapidly realized the importance she had in the whole process. Therefore, the fact that she was dismissed only a month before the festival speaks clearly of the emergency situation the association was in.

Choosing to put away the only paid person in the office could have saved some money in short term. Nevertheless is there a possibility that this decision makes more harm in a long term? The work of a secretary was removed, but for the remaining month before the Festival someone had to hold the organizational process and to finalize the work. There was nobody in the association who was fully qualified, therefore several people were sharing Véronique's responsibilities, which resulted in extra work for everyone, and multiple difficulties to harmonize the process or to learn how to do things. The organization of the 38th edition of the Festival was extremely difficult experience that Empi et Riaume faced.

### **Empi et Riaume and the local politics**

The trials and tribulations this summer didn't stop there. Before I entered the fieldwork I was told that Empi et Riaume is having problems with the town hall. Not the administrative or financial problems I already wrote about, but on another yet level. In 2014 the city of Romans-sur-Isère chose a new mayor- Marie-Hélène Thoraval. Missis Thoraval seemed not very supportive of Empi et Riaume.

The Festival is always taking place the first weekend of July, as it is a moment when the people are not yet in vacation, so they are in the city. Within the years it became a tradition that this particular week is the week of the festivities in the city. Eventually the mayor created a new Festival, offering several evenings of a stand up comedians performances. Despite the opposition from the part of Empi et Riaume, the Comedian festival took the exact dates that the Folklore Festival usually has, as well as its exact location - the gardens of the Shoe Museum. Empi et Riaume were forced to reschedule their Festival a week later. This may seem as a little change, but it had a big importance, as the members of the group explained that later in June many people are going away for summer vacations, especially the students - the target group of recruitment. This imposes a new difficulty, concerning the size of the audience, that was predicted to reduce, because of this change.

Mrs. Thoraval never showed at the press conference, as she was supposed to have a short talk for the media. Instead sent a text message to excuse herself that unfortunately she couldn't come. The mayor didn't honor with her presence the Festival itself. The gesture of giving the guest dance groups gifts from the part of the City of Romans was done by the delegate of the Culture and the delegate of the International relations instead.

This small gestures have a big moral importance for the association. The support of the lack of it from the local political scene are not something to be neglected, especially in this difficult times for the group. On the other hand, this kind of attitude from the local authorities could be the little drop that fills up the glass. Feeling alone against all the problems can be the revealing point, that can make Empi et Riaume fight for their future and take things in their hands, knowing that the only people they can rely on are themselves. Sometimes in times of difficulties coming from outside, the inside relationships tight up, because this is the only way of continuing forward.

## PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MEMORY

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### BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

*"Just as we have recognized ritual and social drama for the condensed presentations they are, so we must recognize movement and dance as forms at once the most and the least resistant to distortion and misappropriation. They provide subtle and multivocalic entryways to cultural examinations both in the actual embodied performance and also in the memory of it."*

*Anya Peterson Royce*

The past is omnipresent in our daily life. It comes up in many ways, and it is something that people seek for relentlessly. David Lowenthal questions the past in its quality of experience and believe *"Memory, history, and relics continually furbish our awareness of the past. But how can we be sure that they reflect what has happened?"*(Lowenthal, 1985;187) In fact for what is said to be the past we openly relay on what is written in the history books and the archives, all the data that has been collected by the historians through the centuries. In this concern, I agree with

Pierre Nora, who expresses the often neglected difference between the notions of memory and history. In his article "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" he explains "*Memory <...> remains in permanent evolution, open to be dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.*" (Nora, 1989;8) The history can be easily deformed or manipulated, especially having in mind that the collecting of the history is a conscious process of human efforts. The memory au contraire occurs without our conscious attempt to create it. Connerton classifies the social memory in three classes "*personal memory claims; cognitive memory claims; the capacity to reproduce a certain performance*" (Connerton, 1989;22). I am mostly interested in this third class of memory claims - that could be named embodied memory. In this context my aim in the further parts of this chapter will be to explore the performance of *Empi et Riaume* as a bodily practice that brings the memory of this group of people into the present reality. The specific cultural heritage the group has shapes their embodied memory and performance in a specific way, therefore I will explore the concrete heritage they have.

Following the statement of Jean H. Speer that "*Performance is a way of knowing - a way of knowing and preserving the memorable past, evaluating the present, making discoveries about the self and connecting with others.*" (Speer, 192; 131) I am willing to explore how *Empi et Riaume* members are creating this process of knowing, preserving and evaluating. Is there a connection between performance and coming to a better awareness of these people's individual and shared identity. I will also examine the role of the Festival within this context, as a specific milieu of expressing the embodied memory and to perform. I will search if there is a link that relates the festival with the self evaluation and the connection with others that Speer mentions.

### **Performing now of the behalf of the past**

*"Folklore at its best addresses both tradition and innovation and shows how constancy and change are interlinked in the dynamic process of civilization".*

*Wolfgang Mieder*

Body movement is a social communication tool - complex, meaningful, continuously changing, in articulation with the individual that performs it. Even though cultural studies are focusing much more on text, object and visual studies, kinetic actions have their place in the same domain. Dance have a lot in common with linguistics when it comes to transmitting messages and negotiating identities

and roles, within the "*arduous task of traducing movement into words, bodily phrasing into syntactical structure, and movement quality into metaphor*"(Foster, 1995;xiii) as Susan Leigh Foster states. Yet it is much more implicit process, as it doesn't state an unequivocal message, dance could be interpreted. Searching the meaning behind a movement sequence is leading into myriad of aspects. It is important to know the social context of the performance, as the personal motivation of the individual, performing. When it comes to a traditional dance - there is a very strong tie between the dancer and his understanding of the social implication of the original dance. To be able to perform a dance correctly, one must be aware of the meaning it has, otherwise the performance becomes closer to simple movements mimicking. The former leader of Empi et Riaume Anne Marie Ciolfi explains that "*Back in the time when these folk dances were created they were mainly bringing pleasure to the dancers themselves, it was not about to show them to others. From the moment one goes on a stage - it all becomes different, it becomes much more about the communication with the audience.*"From the point that dance performance becomes a *communication*, there could be asked the question of 'what exactly is being communicated?', because this is tightly connected with the presumption that folklore dance connects but also explains the connection of past with present. Paul Connerton believes that "*Hence the difficulty of extracting our past from our present: not simply because present factors tend to influence - some might want to say distort- our recollection of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present.*"(Connerton, 1989;2) Undoubtedly the two notions are influencing one another. Folklore dances has been created within certain historical context, bearing specific social role, and yet performing them today, in completely different context and with a completely different role requires attention, so the transition of the past in the present is correct. This case reminds me of the argument if the sacred objects as African masks are charged with the same meaning out of their context - for instance being placed in a museum. Therefore the personal understanding and interpretation of the folklore dance is holding a big responsibility for what is transmitted and communicated to the audience.

If we look at this process in the context of the International Festival in Romans-sur-Isere, one could suggest that the gathering of multiple groups coming from all around the world is having the aim to show the cultures of these countries. Then there is one specific fact, that puts this suggestion in question - when they are invited, the dance groups are kindly asked not to wave their national flags on the stage. I was honestly surprised and uncomprehending this decision. Discussing it with members of the group I was given the explanation that the idea of the festival is to bring cultures together, to open the perception and enrich the knowledge of the audience, to provoke curiosity towards the other cultures - and this has nothing to do with the idea of nationalism or political flags and separations. I have been told that the countries who are most eager to have their flag on stage, are the small republics,

or the countries who were oppressed or struggling for years with their political status. Therefore the idea of the decision was to "*promote pride of one's culture, not one's country.*"

### **Cultural heritage, identity and self perception**

*"If we conceive of culture as a body that is kept healthy by expression of communal order, then performances <...> are it's necessary sweet and bittersweet food."*

*Jean Haskell Speer*

Speer believes that "*The types of performances depend on the social matrix and cultural traditions of a community.*" (Speer, 1992; 131) In order to understand the nature of Empi et Riaume's performances, let's explore their social matrix and cultural traditions. Empi is one of the few French folklore groups, who collected by themselves the biggest part of the dances they perform. The creator of the group Miss Bouvier was visiting together with the members of the group villages and hamlets where the peasants were still keeping alive a fading knowledge. Many of the peasants were thinking that those "people from the city" are asking them to dance only to make fun of them. Therefore the members of Empi et Riaume were performing first, and the peasants were eventually agreeing to dance later. The movements were written down and afterwards being adapted for a stage performance, but the steps and the essentials were always kept. Empi et Riaume has multiple different kinds of dances, each one of them representing a special time of the year, a concrete occasion or celebration, relationships between boys and girls etc. The repertoire of the group is a rich collection, preserving precious, already vanished knowledge. All of the dances are of local rural origin, different from folk dances in other French regions. While discussing the multitude of dances, Pierrette Bertrand told me with explicit pride "*We need to respect our roots. We wouldn't be where we are, with our knowledge and our spirit and all it comes with that, without the people before us who made so many things in the region.*" There were multiple ways how Empi et Riaume members were showing the respect and appreciation of their roots. I observed often in the repetitions a moment when different dancers were debating the meaning of a particular step in a dance, connecting it to its initial role and significance.

Nevertheless there was a specific difference, comparing the self evaluation and feeling of self representation within the older generation and within the young dancers. While talking with Giovanni Gulino he mentioned that back in the days to be a "folklorist" was a great pride. People were really happy to show it because it was such an honour to be elected to join a folklore dance group. Many people were trying to enter folklore dance groups, so only the best ones were selected. Being part of a folklore group was a real reputation and recognition. Not

more than 20 years later things seem to be different. One of the days in the office I was discussing with Léa, she is one of the young dancers, currently 18 years old. I asked her what her classmates and friends think about her dancing in Empi et Riaume, and that maybe some of her friends would like to join. Her answer caught me unprepared: *"I usually don't mention to my classmates that I practice Folklore dances"*. Her explanation was that it is not such a popular occupation anymore, compared to other types of dance. She affirmed that nowadays it is better accepted to dance something more modern and contemporary, therefore when she tells about the folklore, many of her friends see it as rather obsolete and strange occupation.

Similar polemic was raised concerning the costumes. Lets first precise that the group starts having established costumes only after the World War II. The majority of them were recreated by the president of the group herself. Miss Bouvier was dedicated to create the clothes as truthful as possible to the tradition. Today Pierrette Bertrand is taking care of the enormous collection of dresses, scarves, aprons, hats, headdresses, petticoats etc. She is also selecting who is wearing what on stage, and therefore preparing each single part of the costumes and keeping them in a good condition, clean and ready. All this involves cleaning, starching up, sewing, ironing, resizing and many more. Being responsible for the costumes of more than 20 dancers is a highly time consuming and laborious occupation. Very indicative fact is that due to the financial difficulties of the people in the association, last year Pierrette was creating and repairing every costume part for free. *"There was not a question to lose any members only because they couldn't afford a costume."* Pierrette explains. Each dancer possess personally only one costume - the official Empi et Riaume one - the costume "Dauphinois". The embroideries are typical and authentically recreated. In 1980 the group starts to create the so called "special costumes", that exist in only one replica, representing the clothes used for special occasions. I had the chance to learn the different clothes according to each city in the region, according to the social position of the owner -rich bourgeois dresses, poor peasants clothes, the merchant costume, the teacher feathered hat, the special laundry days dress etc. Pierrette continues the idea of Miss Bouvier and every single piece is created after a vast research. Some clothes are recreated after authentic dresses found in the old houses, or in the museums, others were taken from ancient paintings, and carefully made the closest way possible. The costume maker says *"I didn't create some of the costumes I could, because I find that the information we have is not sufficient. I prefer to abstain myself, rather to do something not corresponding to the truth."*, then she continues *"We are very attached to our costumes. We try to teach the kids from the very beginning. The normal reaction of a 6 years old child is to ask <<When are we going to disguise?>> So instantly we explain that this is not a masquerade where you need a disguise, but it's a **costume we put on**. We try to explain easily, and I think that the big difference comes from there - because we teach them to respect and appreciate the costume, which is something that is sometimes difficult to teach the*

*grown up ones.*" This transition and teaching to respect their clothing heritage are going and to hand with the appreciation of the big work, accompanying costumes creation. Once aware of the laborious process, and the beauty and significance of the collection and recreation of these dresses, one gets involved and affectionate with this heritage. Pierrette is the best person to defend this, as she is not only working when in Empi et Riaume, her whole house full of different costume parts, sewing machines, measurements and tools. Her hobby is to create small dolls, wearing tiny replica of the group clothes. She is more than devoted to this activity. *"Whenever I go I am having an eye for what can I use for the costumes. When my grandson was sick in the hospital of Grenoble, the mornings I was going around the shops to search for fabrics good enough for the costumes. The afternoons we were visiting in the hospital, and the evening I was already trying to calculate schemes and measurements for a new costume."*

Yet, similarly to the case with the dances, the young generation is extremely self conscious when it comes to the costumes too. Behind the stage of the festival one of the young dancers was expressing her disappointment that she needs to dance with a dress, different from the official ones, that happen to be her favorite. She was telling me how much she likes the official Empi et Riaume costume. Later on we discussed the feeling of wearing a folklore dress. *"When you don't know anyone in the audience it's easy, but if you have classmates there or someone you like in the audience it gets more complicated. It's a little bit difficult to make people nowadays accept a folklore costume-sometimes they find it strange.. But I find it magnificent, I love it! Also I think that when you put on your costume you become a different person, and when you are on stage it's not the same thing at all. My best friend is for example a very shy girl, but when we are on stage - we are all charismatic. And all this feeling it a lot about the costume."* In her words it can be easily seen that the opinion of the people counts a lot, and sometimes it enters in a clash with the dancers understanding of their dress code. Thus the importance of this inner conflict is important in the context of Speer's statement that *"performance reveals, shapes, and sometimes transforms personal and cultural identity."* (Speer, 1992;11) Does that mean that the young dancers nowadays are much more vulnerable to outside influence, compared with the adults who have more stable perception of their cultural heritage and the modernity? If this is true, then the importance of the communicational gap between the generations within the folklore group gains a new importance. Therefore it maybe becomes the key towards a more solid and sustainable transition of values.

### **Archive of the association**

*"Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally."*

Pierre Nora



When in the early afternoon Empi et Riaume becomes quiet and one can hear the birds from outside heading to her silent and peaceful office is the archivist of Empi et Riaume. Miss Giselle is nearly 90 years old, but this can't hold her back from her occupations. She climbs slowly the stairs to the second floor towards her office for the past 17 years. The archive room is situated between the main office and the costume room. The very first thing that captures the attention after entering is the globe on the right of the door. Then the gaze is catching the whole - multiple shelves with books, folders and documentation piles. Uniquely in the peaceful afternoon is when all the archive process is happening - research, ordering, structuring and categorizing, away from the clutter of the rehearsals. An archive is indeed a very structured and time resistant component in the people's attempt to preserve the historical background of something. I was expecting a big archive of the folklore association, as I already knew they had a long and variegated history. What surprised me nevertheless was the incredible richness of it, as it was beyond any of my expectations. In multiple folders there was written down the history and the activity of Empi et Riaume through the years, from the very beginning. As the very first intention of the group was not folklore dance, but folklore theater plays - all the original play scenarios and ideas were also attentively classified. Later when the group started to gather dances and songs - the collection of all these pieces of puzzle found also their own folders in the Empi et Riaume shelves. The detailed description of each song and dance is black on white, waiting to be consulted by the dancers, if in doubt. Many of them has their explanation of how they were collected, what was their initial role and context. A very precise summary of all the costumes, headdresses and other accessories of the specific clothing the group uses is also collected in two volumes, including photos and paintings of the costumes. A large collection of local folk tales and sayings is also a part of the treasures of the archive, some of the volumes consist of explanations of the origin of some beliefs and perceptions in the region. An enormous quantity of photos of the group through the years are carefully put together, so they can give a unique visual perception of the events that the group were been through. There are two volumes of media memories - including every single article in a news paper that concerns Empi et Riaume or the Folklore Festival. A specific pride of the archivist is are the volumes, that explain the dates of each festival through the years, all the guest groups, in return all the countries, places and festivals that Empi et Riaume visited and some specific facts around the events and travels. Entering the archive office I was feeling like entering an enormous golden mine for each researcher interested in French authentic folklore.

Pierre Nora, who calls our contemporary society "*hopelessly forgetful*" argues that "*Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.*" (Nora, 1989;13) He argues that

our times are extremely fruitful in what is "archive creating", and that never in the history of humankind so far there was such an urge of writing down, recording, photographing and preserving moments and occurrences. Yet Miss Giselle was expressing her concern that in her opinion the dancers are not enough interested by the archive they have. She was conscious about the big difference that knowing the background of their folklore heritage could change severely the perception and comprehension of their activity. Maybe it is possible that the transmission of this knowledge is a way of shortening up the gap between the different generations of the dancers?

## **INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL "CULTURES AND TRADITIONS FROM THE WORLD"**

*"Then they [Empi et Riaume] came to the Twinning committee after '77, animators determined to promote meetings involving the broad layers of the population, eager to connect groups and individuals beyond the boundaries, so that all of them enrich from their differences."*

*Henri Bertholet<sup>4</sup>*

In 1977 Empi et Riaume connects with the Twinning committee of Romans-sur-Isere with the idea of creating a Folklore festival. The initiative was successful and the first edition of the Festival takes place in the weekend of the Pentecost (a Christian holiday, celebrated fifty days after Easter Sunday). In the first years the city of Romans was living several days within rhythm, music and dances of all Europe. Very soon the festival expanded its borders, and groups were visiting from all over the world. The International Folklore Festival "Cultures and Traditions of the World" became a highly anticipated event. The years after 2000 were highly productive, while the Festival program was been longer than 7 days, with participants from up to 5 different continents. In 2002 the Festival is acknowledged by CIOFF, as a recognition of the high quality of the event. CIOFF, or the International Council of Organizations of Folklore and Folk Arts is an Official Partner of UNESCO, accredited to the UNESCO ICH Committee. Created in 1970, the duty of CIOFF is safeguarding, promoting and diffusing traditional culture and folklore.<sup>5</sup> The efforts of the organization are leading towards promoting the immaterial heritage in forms as music, dance, rituals, customs and other art expressions. CIOFF and its members are serving the objectives of UNESCO, working towards a culture of peace and non-

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<sup>4</sup> President of the Twinning and International exchanges committee of Romans sur Isere in 1984, his speech was taken from the fascicle, *Empi et Riaume - 50 ans de folklore*, 1984

<sup>5</sup> Information taken from the official website of CIOFF, [www.cioff.org](http://www.cioff.org)

violence. Each year, CIOFF assures the coordination of about 250 festivals in more than 50 countries, reaching around fifty thousand artists. For CIOFF Festival organizers, this worldwide network represents an opportunity for exchange of ideas, learning from other festivals experiences and international cooperation. The CIOFF Festivals commonly share cultural objectives, organizational quality and high artistic level.

Within the years the festival became a natural expansion of the daily activities of Empi et Riaume. It demonstrates the group's commitment to all the popular traditions and allows artistic expression of young artists from around the world asserting the necessary principles of tolerance and brotherhood, and valuing the cultural diversity. Therefore the visiting artists are warmly accommodated within numerous families in the city of Romans. This way the meeting of a new culture is not only within the frame of public- dancers on the stage, it goes also the opposite way. Foreign dancers are accepted as guests in people's homes for several days, having the chance to experience the local French way of living. Many friendships and anecdotes have been created within the years.

### **Let's cultivate our differences**

*"<...> Individual ethnic identities are valued more and more. For many of these groups the emphasis on identity means reviving traditions that have long since disappeared, and so in a very real sense the revived traditions are 'new' traditions, sometimes in form, sometimes in function, and sometimes in both." (Royce, 2002:109)*

The International Festival brings up together dancers from extremely different parts of the world. Every year they are trying to invite groups from a country that haven't yet participated in the event. As a researcher, days before the festival itself I was already asking myself the question 'How to put in the same analytical frame all these diverse traditional dances, coming from different cultural backgrounds, countries and contexts?'. The festival was having dance groups from Botswana, Ecuador, Peru, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Canada and southern France - a big cultural diversity. Then I experienced the 5 days of festivities, fully, forgetting absolutely about my initial questions, assumptions or anything related with my research. I was deeply involved with filming, but the event itself overwhelmed me emotionally without me even noticing how and when. I felt it as absolutely intense experience, that I needed some time after, before I could start reflecting upon, or making any type of analyze. Later on I was absolutely certain that comparing the different dances, or dress code, or performances was absolutely pointless in my research. What was important for me to see was the passionate collision of all these different cultures and the incredible merge of emotions and experience that the dancers had. "Let's cultivate our differences" was the name of the last festivity night -

the night when all dance group were on the stage, the biggest night of the Festival. It implies the idea of Empi et Riaume as an organizer to show how different the cultures around the world could be, and in the same time the points of similarity exist. Also it underlines the fact that the cultural diversity is a unique richness. In the book 'Performance, Culture and Identity' Speer and Fine state "*Performance is a process by which we construct and negotiate culture and identity, and we have hope that it leads us to deeper identification with one another. Performance is one of the means, perhaps the most potent means, of bringing out the significant resemblances between people. Yet the concept of identification with one another is ambiguous. It implies that we recognize shared similarities, but also that there are in fact divisions between us.*" (Speer, 1989; 17) While implying that there are divisions between cultures, the folklore gives the opportunity of comparison. Giovanni Gulino told me something that caught my attention, he said that folklore "*Gives the capacity to not fear the others.*" Meeting people from different horizons, with different cultures and religions is still connecting people, because of their sharing of the same passion "*A passion for traditions, and respect for values.*" He concluded by affirming that folklore is "*all about the sharing, that focuses on understanding others.*" I haven't thought about that in this way, and I was deeply touched by this statement. Then suddenly I related to Giovanni's words, as I had myself an unexpected experience of overcoming my own irrational rigidity. When the dancers from Sri Lanka were performing I experienced something new for me - facing my irrational fear of a certain culture, fear provoked only because the culture in question is truly different from mine. I was never having understanding of Hindu cultures, and from my childhood I was perceiving them as too overwhelming for me. Unconsciously in the beginning I was avoiding Sri Lanka dance group, but later I had the chance to see their dances just in front of me, to touch their costumes, to see how they play with fire, to hear their unique drum music, but most important - to talk with those people. In the very last night I dance with them in the Festival after party, and I felt that they are not so distant from me anymore. Yes, they are different, but this difference was not frightening me anymore, it was fascinating me, and it was sparkling up my curiosity. I can personally admit that folklore is opening people's minds, helping them to accept the different, and not to fear it.

### **Creation of connections**

Juxtaposing differences and similarities is a big part of the Festival, but the most precious side of the event that I noticed was the creation of multiple connections on so many levels. Fundamentally one of the reasons for me to do my fieldwork with Empi et Riaume was the astonishment of love-connections that are being created so spontaneously, within the context of such a brief encounter-

envisaging the love story of my parents in law Elena and Giovanni. Thus these are not the only bonds that appear, the festival affects multiple actors.

One of the particularities in the Festival of Romans is that a big part of the dancers are accommodated by local families. These families are volunteers, and what impressed me was that they are the same circle of families for many years. There are new ones that join every year, but the old ones rarely stop accepting dancers. Nowadays the concept of accepting strangers home is not a taboo, as practices such as Couchsurfing are widely spread. Yet for a rather small town like Romans-sur-Isere this is an interesting chance. I was asking myself what makes these people year after year having unknown people home for a week? A conversation with two of the volunteer families gave me some answers. This is what Nicole Narros told me: *"We are accommodating dancers since 1997. It all started because our daughter was dancing with the kids group in Empi et Riaume. The very first group we had home were from Romania. The father of my husband was very old at this time, so they went to play an 'aubade' under his windows especially for him. It was marvelous!"* From 1997 her family was accepting dancers, and this woman was remembering every single one of them.

Nicole            -We received two times Peru, two times Mexico, one time Paraguay...

Friend of hers -Argentina?

Nicole            -No, not Argentina..

Friend of hers -Oh, we had Argentina twice, and they were teaching us to dance tango at home! "

Not only they were remembering every group, but the stories were so multiple, that it was hard for them to decide what to tell me first. Some of them were funny, others sad, and third ones honestly touching; *"And this year we went to Peru to see our little ones.. who call us Mom and Dad... But even in Mexico they are waiting for us, and when they found out we're going to Peru they told us that next trip should be visiting Mexico. It is a strong feeling, we joke around, but the truth is that the relations created are strong. And we cry a lot! And anyways we feel them as our children- if they are sick we are running to our doctor and we take care of them as our own children."* The connections I was been told about were impressively strong, especially having in mind the short period of time that these people have to bond. I witnessed the true friendships that appeared within the Canadian group of dancers and their accommodation families this year. The Canadians were sending their love and gratefulness to their hosts from the stage, and the families who were sitting in the audience were endlessly happy.

Other type of bonds that are being created within the frames of the International Festival are the ones between the dancers themselves. Often different groups instantly connect, and the few days of festivities become an unforgettable experience. There is another, yet rare type of connections that sometimes appears- the uniting of two fighting or even warring groups of people. Giovanni and Elena Gulino shared with me one of their experiences, that is a very strong example of such

happening. "Several months after the Rwandan genocide we received a folklore group from Rwanda, composed of Hutu and Tutsi people. They performed together folklore from both of the tribes. Only six months earlier these two tribes had killed and ripped apart each others... To see these people on the stage singing and dancing all together... well, if this is not brotherhood.. I don't know what else it could be." The Rwandan genocide was a deeply tragic loss of people lives. The idea that folklore have the ability to put these people together despite everything, and to make them create art and leave behind the horror of their historical background - this is an incredibly strong statement of the power of folkloric performance and the unique atmosphere the festivity events can create.

## VII. CONCLUSION

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The time spend with Empi et Riaume was for me a personal challenge - overcoming my shyness and insecurities, finding my way out towards people's life and being able to grasp an understanding of their reality. The questions I had before going in Romans-sur-Isere were divers, and my expectations - wide and chaotic. The folklore reality I faced was nevertheless tremendously different from any of my anticipations.

I find out that the feeling of belonging to a group of people is something that can't be imposed artificially of purposely, it is a phenomenon that occurs naturally or doesn't, but can't be forced to do so. Yet, to maintain the atmosphere of what Victor Turner calls "*communitas*" there is a long way of efforts to be made, inside group 'rituals' to be established, values to be communicated and preserved...

The second tentative finding was connected to my initial confusion, due to the specifically tense relations between the group members. My shock gradually became an understanding. Disagreements and tension are an inevitable part of a group dynamic, no matter if reasons are inside or outside caused. Although conflict situations are unpleasant, they have the dual nature: they can ruin a collectivity, and yet they have the quality to improve the state of being of the group, to change the paradigm of it, therefore to make it more flexible. Also the resolution of group conflicts often suggests the search of new ideas and ways of development. The same applies to the process of facing difficulties, coming from outside a group - it can destroy it, or it can mobilize the people to become creative, tied up their relationships and deal with surprising solutions. Conflicts and dramas imply change, and as such should be regarded with bigger curiosity and less anxiety.

I also understood that folklore dance is constantly changing trough the years, not only by its form. The perception of the people who practice it and the way the audience is living it varies. The dynamic nature of the folklore, and specifically of

the folklore dance is despite of it related to the natural continuity and adaptation of it. Folklore traditions persists for hundreds of years, but in order to do so, it has to evolve. I also find out that folklore is a milieu that has the ability to bring people together and create connections between them, but also to connect past and present in a very unique way.

Empi et Riaume has a rich and varying history, sewed from moments of joy and moments of difficulties. The group has connected families, enriched people's perceptions and curiosity, created friendships, but also has gone through moments of crisis, has taken difficult and not always pleasant decisions and so on. The story of this group of people is strongly emotional and I can without any hesitance compare it to a story of a big family- with all the ups and downs, fights and reconciliations. The period of my fieldwork was a specifically intense and hard time for the group. Since I left many things had changed. Alain Champey took the presidency post. Céline Bully is taking care of the PR and image promotion of Empi. The group is currently preparing the 39th issue of the Festival, that is going to be held from 6th to 10th of July, with guest groups coming from Ivory Coast, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Bolivia, USA, Croatia and south France. Several members came back to Empi et Riaume, and the organizational process is happening with the help and advices of Anne Marie Ciolfi. In the end of September the city library of Romans-sur-Isere is hosting a nearly one month long exposition, named "Local traditions and world culture" treating the history of the folklore association and the festival. Undoubtedly the group is still facing difficulties, but step by step they are fighting to go forward and continue their story.

As for my role in their adventure, I was invited to be part of the upcoming Festival, and in July I will join Empi et Riaume as a guide of the Bulgarian dance group, and a translator for the Kazakhstan dance group. To live this vibrant event for a second year is extremely exciting for me, but what touches me is the relationship that I managed to create with the people there, as they accepted me as one of them. I feel as I became a part of the big family called Empi et Riaume.

## VIII. LITERATURE

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