

ROMANIA'S CENTENARY AND YOUNG ROMANIANS' VIEW OF THEIR OWN IDENTITY

Irina ERHAN, Florentina HĂHĂIANU

“Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy

Abstract: Starting from Erikson's idea that identity is a coherent self image made up of the goals, values and beliefs that a person is firmly committed to, our article aims to analyze how Romania's Centenary celebrations have succeeded in fostering in young people the belief in the grandeur of Romania's national values or annihilating the feeling of pride in belonging to a big nation. The main objective of our paper revolves around the way in which this anniversary event has succeeded or failed to strengthen the Romanian nation. We will equally address the hypothesis that the Centenary could represent that country project that is currently lacking in Romania. We will also employ the theory of the form without substance in our analysis, given the fact that the Centenary and the Romanian hospitality give a formal boost to Romania's image. In our approach we will equally resort to the methodological instruments delivered by anthropology, since seen as a ritual the Centenary gave voice to two contradictory opinions, one attacking the national spirit and disavowing the symbols, rituals and national myths, the other defending them, but in a tedious and redundant rhetoric. For an interdisciplinary approach, the anthropological perspective will outline the premises for a qualitative psychological analysis. In an experiment, we need to make it clear that shaping a national identity among young Romanians is a process that can happen due to all the efforts put in celebrating the Centenary.

Keywords: identity; national identity; Centenary; country project

1. INTRODUCTION

Any cultural system gives the individual a predetermined structure of values and meanings, which creates an internal, coherent unity and continuity. These values are transmitted through exposure to customs, traditions, laws and rules. Each individual forms their own values as a result of the product of the cultural values learned in the socialization process, as well as of the unique personal experience. One of the unique experiences of 2018 is the celebration of the Centenary of the Great Union of Romania.

The dissolution of communism and the accession of Romania to the Euro-Atlantic values created the favorable context for anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists to focus more closely on the symbolism of national anniversaries and the manner in which both the political class and the civil society offer new interpretations of national moments and national rituals.

In this context, the centenary of a nation is a precious tool for analysis through the lenses of a multidisciplinary approach, all the more so as it reflects equally the attributes of that society, how it has been related to the Centenary and its own

identity, but and its ability to make correlations between the national anniversary event and the contemporary global and regional crises.

Celebrating one hundred years since the Great Union of Alba Iulia in 1918, in which the Romanian historical provinces unite and form Great Romania, the Centenary meant the remembrance of the moment of perfection of the Romanian unitary national state, as well as the awareness of the repositioning of Romania on the map the history of the XXth century, dominated by new original models of negotiation of global positions and interests.

2. NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOLESCENCE

To understand how the youngsters reported themselves to the Centenary, we need to understand how they relate to their own identity. Therefore, we will take into account the age of adolescence, because it is the age that has as a purpose the quest for identity. Erikson (1950, *apud* Papalia *et al.*, 2010) defines this search for identity as the coherent consequence of itself, made of goals, values and convictions that the person has a

firm commitment to. It is the age at which there is the effort to understand oneself. This crisis is the main task of adolescence to define the individual with a coherent sense of self and a valuable role in society. This individual identity suggests an identity of self, a rather subjective structure, assumed by the person, according to particular and unique provisions.

One of the major issues to be solved to help shape the identity of young people is the adoption of the values they will guide (Erikson, 1968, *apud* Papalia *et al.*, 2010). To analyze the theme of this paper, we will focus our attention on forming a set of values. The period of adolescence allows young people to seek commitments that can remain faithful to them. It is a necessary period for building a stable self-esteem, a set of values to identify with. Therefore, adolescents who satisfactorily solve the identity crisis develop their virtue of fidelity. By referring to values and their hierarchy, this identity of the individual is built in relation to them. This is negotiated and is based on the context with which we are in permanent contact.

Moreover, the community environment equips the individual with a social identity, implicitly with a national identity, in which the personal identity profile is reconfigured in relation to the exigencies of the social roles in the socio-historical contexts in which the individual is integrated (Gavreliuc, 2011). Substantialist theories emphasize biological, social or historical features (Gavreliuc, 2011). Therefore, the national identity becomes a historical data that anticipates the person's belonging to a certain national community. Instead, interacting theories emphasize building self-image in relation to other social actors in a particular society (Gavreliuc, 2011). National identity in this case becomes not so much an inheritance but a permanent crystallization and cultural and social negotiation.

“The process of forming values proceeds concurrently with the process of defining the identity of the individual.” (Gavreliuc 2002a:324). Throughout this process, the individual is continually interacting with the environment and those he / she comes into contact with, his / her perceptions being always validated or denied. As it reflects and clarifies its identity dilemmas, the person gets more clarity about who he/she is, both individually and socially.

3. DESIGN OF RESEARCH

3.1 The motivation of research. The present scientific approach is based on the premise that a ritual is an instrument of social order (Leach,

1968:520-536) or a formal act with a symbolic component through which a person manifests his respect for an object or action of absolute value, Erving Goffman quoted by Catherine Bell (1997:141) subtly perceiving the idea that organizing social gatherings into various formal events trains people who live after a set of moral and social rules specific to a particular culture to be self-regulating participants (1967:19, 22-23, 31-33, 42-45; 1971:62-74), although the ritual does not have the same connotations and stakes for all human beings. Claiming that the rituals tend to be governed by formalism and traditionalism, because it obliges the participants to turn to formal rhetoric (Bell, 1997:139), Catherine Bell, quoting Bloch, asserts that

highly formalized discursive ways of speaking and communicating tend to be closely connected with traditional forms of social hierarchy and authority (1997:140).

In this context, the rituals contribute to the

recreation of a society in which its members worship the same objects and share experiences that help form and sustain deep emotional bonds among the members (ed. Etzioni & Bloom, 2004: 7).

Aspiring to be a source of data about a particular society, about the beliefs and attributes of a people (Etzioni & Bloom, 2004:9-10), while the same ritual may have different roles within society, meaning that for a part of a society may have the function of renewal or what the authors call it “recommitment holidays”, while for another segment of the population it may have the role of releasing of tensions or “the tension management holidays” (Etzioni & Bloom, 2004:11). Hence, the holidays can contribute to changing social relations, in this sense we can identify group celebrations does not undermine commitment to the whole (Etzioni & Bloom, 2004:17), but there are also group ceremonies that are clear expressions of separation from the entire society or from another group (Etzioni & Bloom, 2004:19).

The rituals contribute to the building of identity, Ioana Leucea noting that identity can provide a frame “to think about the links between the person and society” (2012: 59), “integrates individuals into the community through ethnicity, nationalism, race, gender and other social categories” (Leucea, 2012:65) and, at the same time, definitively establishes the dichotomy – “we”-“others” (Leucea, 2012:63).

3.2 The objective of research. In the present scientific approach, research strategy and methods are based on a qualitative approach. The main objective of this research is to identify whether the Centenary celebration is a reflection of the articulation of one's own identity, especially among the teenagers.

3.3 Research hypotheses. Starting from the above objective, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Ip.1: Centenary is a ritual loaded with uncontroversial symbols and a substitute for a denser country project.

Ip.2: Centenary is a moment of reflection on the articulation of one's own identity.

Ip.3: The Centenary Celebration activities determine among those who are at the end of adolescence a process of shaping national identity.

3.4 Sample and methods. The group involved in this research comprises 40 students in the social sciences program, aged 19-20.

To demonstrate the hypothesis we will use as investigation methods: case study and experiment.

The case study thoroughly examined the celebration and symbolism of the Centenary. This was done through an interdisciplinary approach, using additional information from anthropology, political science and psychology, in order to know as many aspects of this phenomenon as possible.

The experiment was based on the idea that persuasive communication will succeed in helping to shape a national identity among young people. The experiment had two stages: in the first, under the pretext of an exhibition to be held on the occasion of the Centenary, the subjects reflected and answered two questions (What is the Centenary for Romania? What is the Centenary for you?). Two months after completing the two questions, the subjects took part in the Centenary Celebration Exhibition and had a meeting with a teacher who presented them historical data and meanings of this celebration. The persuasive message was set up to shape a national identity that begins at the age of the beginning of the youth. In the second stage, one month after reflecting on the speech, they again answered the two questions (What is the Centenary for Romania, What is the Centenary for You?). The purpose of including the experiment in this research was to help increase its overall value.

3.5 Results in empirical research. Centenary as a ritual and a substitute for a country project. In this sense, the centenary as a ritual has given rise

to two types of narratives, on the one hand part of the political elite promoting a discourse focused on the idea of a prosperous and powerful Romania only by suspending conflicts "between Romanians", disseminated in the public space through mobilizing words like "ending the Romanians' war against the Romanians" (Lupitu, 2018)¹

On the other hand, the celebration of the centenary organized by the state authorities seemed to focus on the past and less on the future of Romania, being perceived as a tribute to the simultaneous efforts of our ancestors in the service of the national desideratum. This kind of celebration of the past, which involves the spending of public money, reminds us of the Iranian shah regime and the exacerbated exaltation (October 1971) of the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great.² In this key of interpretation, the Centenary seems to have served the Romanians' need to recover the period when communism did not allow them to be present on the global stage, regardless of the economic costs of these rituals.

Also, the Centenary as any event celebrated lavishly and even ostentatiously traces the past and the future of that nation, in the public space, it seemed to be a substitute for a consistent country project that is lacking in Romania for the next hundred years. (<http://centenar.gov.ro/web/>)

So can we conclude that the hypothesis *Centenary is a ritual loaded with uncontroversial symbols and a substitute for a denser country project* is being verified.

At the discursive level, the Centenary offered the opportunity for political and intellectual elites to focus on the fight against corruption, although this issue has also led to more types of reading, because it is not clear what is meant by anti-corruption notion. (<https://inpolitics.ro>; <https://www.turdanews.net>)

Centenary as a step of reflection on the articulation of national identity. In spite of a

¹ See also Gabriel Valentin. 28.11.2018. Evenimentul zilei. „Dragnea: „Trebuie să încetăm acest război între români și români”. <https://evz.ro/dragnea-razboi-romani.html>

² Thus, if the declared primary objective of the Iranian holiday lies in grouping the nation around its regained identity, allowing all Iranian citizens to overcome any personal frustration and “to see where they come from and where they go” (Pahlavi, 2003: 87), later, it received the connotations of a festivity whose purpose was to legitimize the regime of Iranian shah, which had lost its popular support.

logo, the Centenary was treated as an event dominated by populist speeches, centered around the idea of preserving what the Romanian people have and less on the idea of building and prospering, especially in the conditions of Romania's demographic decline and exodus labor and talents to the Western states, given that, according to UN reports Romania occupies the second place in a global migration top, after Syria. (Alexe, 2018). Therefore, the hypothesis *Centenary is a moment of reflection on the articulation of one's own identity, which is partially verified*, as the moment of reflection should have centered on the idea of prosperity.

Or, in this sense, the Romanian nation seems to forget to reinvent, and these rituals failed to propel the feeling of belonging to the whole, just as only the Israeli nation successfully managed to preserve its faith in the singularity and greatness of its national values, and articulates their own identity by promoting the consciousness of belonging to the group, whether it is a linguistic, religious or ethnic group³. The Israeli leadership, more than ever, bet on the idea that the nation is perpetuated by organizing symbols, rituals and customs, and that Jewish identity continues to be a distinct reality because every Jewish native is aware of the problem of identifying with a group.

According to Eugen Simion, the theme of Romanian identity was born two types of attitudes that reside in either aggressive (...) nationalism, which mocks "national myths" or in a "dramatization" in the style of the heroes of I.L. Caragiale, which "defends tradition, language, national myths "through a content-free rhetoric". (2015: 20)

Understanding "to voice attitudes, mentalities and collective behaviors resulting from the belonging of individuals" to a group (Schifirneț, 2009: 464), national identity can be correlated with history, place of birth, rituals and language, the latter being the most convincing argument the identity of the nation. The answer to the legitimate

question "who are we?" captures the essence of national identity, and Romanianness, in its capacity as an identity category, deserves to be analyzed in the full equation with the presence of an ethnic conscience in all those who consider Romanian language as their mother tongue. On the other hand, the religious identity element has the role of "preserving the Romanian culture and spirituality" (Schifirneț, 2009:471), as Islam contributes decisively to the creation of arabness (Sitaru, 2009: 111-113) in this case, Orthodoxy occupying, a special place into the identity thesaurus, by deepening the opposition "us" – "the others". (Chiorean, Sigmirean, 2012)

Centenary, a process of shaping the national identity among those who are at the end of adolescence. In the first stage of the experiment, the answers to the question "What is the Centenary for Romania?" focused on describing the Centenary as a unique moment that celebrates 100 years since the achievement of the Great Union and reflection on the past, as well as the joy of excitement involves such an event. On the opposite side, there were 3 responses that ranked in the state reconstruction area, being considered a moment of opportunity to affirm at international level. There were also no answers that had a negative connotation in the sense that the centenary feast is a pretext for corrupt personalities to build a better image but also to waste money.

As far as the answers to the question "What is the Centenary for me?", 9 of them were circumscribed to feelings of pride and joy. 5 responses were placed in the insignificant area, the feast not giving rise to any feeling. More than half of the answers were official, presenting the Centenary as a historic day, a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Union of 1918.

In the second stage of the experiment, following the intervention of the teacher by presenting data on the importance of the Centenary celebration, the answers to the question "What is the Centenary for Romania?" have been placed in the area of describing the Centenary as a unique moment that celebrates 100 years since the achievement of the Great Union, but grew the number of responses to 6, the ones that focus on the area of change, the reconstruction of Romania, an opportunity for affirmation, a greater power in decision-making and action have grown. 3 responses with negative connotations have placed this time in the area of a too publicized celebration, in order to gain profit from the marketing of some products.

³ Regarding the discussion of Jewishness, it should be noted that hebrew was reinvented as a national language, although most of the Jewish immigrants were Yiddish speakers, precisely to enshrine the nation. On the other hand, the adoption of a religious identity by the majority of Jews in Israel and the awareness that they belong to a distinct ethnic group that built the state of Israel ("Israel was, is and will be a state of the Jews") (Friedman, 2018) represent political acts of reinventing the new Jew and establishing a "link between this Israeli national identity and the Jewish character of the State of Israel." (Greilsammer, 2007)

As for the answers to the question “What is the Centenary for me?”, 15 of them have circumscribed their feelings of pride. The 5 answers remained constant and placed in the insignificant area, the feast not giving rise to any feeling. Less than half of the responses were official but various in content, presenting the Centenary as a historic day, a unique celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Union of 1918, the recognition of the initiative for a united Romania, etc. Moreover, there have been answers that have been placed in the area of reflection to the present and the future, defining the Centenary as a hope for a better Romania.

Analyzing the two stages of the experiment, we can see that, as it reflects and clarifies its identity dilemmas, student responses gain greater clarity of who they are, relative to the national identity level. Let us not forget that these students are in the process of finalizing their own identity. From this analysis we can conclude that the message of the teacher was a persuasive one that encouraged reflection on national identity. Therefore, the hypothesis that *the Centenary celebration activities determine among those who are at the end of adolescence a process of shaping the national identity* is verified.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Centenary also represented an opportunity for reflection on the future of Romania in the 21st century, as the files in progress such as the Brexit and the robustness of the European Union, Russia's revanchist reactions, the crisis of migration and terrorism, the reserved position of the United States over the retention post-war alliances coupled with multidimensional internal actions and crises, obliges Romania not to assist passively, but to adopt positions, mobilize resources and facilitate coherent responses to known and unpredictable crises in the context of holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019.

In this era of globalization and of European integration, of a changing world and volatile borders, the discussion must be waged around the feeling of being Romanian and the need to preserve the advantages of one's own identity, especially given the phenomenon of the Romanians' exodus in the West for a better living leads us to talk of a new Romania beyond its traditional borders, in which two kinds of narratives can be identified, namely one of preserving, by any means, the cultural and spiritual

identity⁴ and another of the unconditional abolition of identity, on the background of the the fastest and better integration into the communities in which they live and work. (Olaru Naneti, 2007: 823)

Therefore, this will lead to the formation of a national identity, not just inherited, but also permanently crystallized, culturally and socially negotiated. We can have generations involved, generations that convey the desire for a better Romania if we adopt positions in this respect.

Both the Romanians inside the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic arc and those who go to work in the West have the noble mission of thinking about a viable country project built around "we", more determined to renounce to a certain type of autism to the real problems of society, and the obsessive return to the past has the role not to appeal against the present, but to be a mobilizing pattern of the masses for a better future.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Irina Erhan would like to thank to PhD Silviu Petre for the ideas and the many discussions she has had on this topic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Alexe, A. (Februarie, 2018). 3.4 million Romanians left the country in the last 10 years; second highest emigration growth rate after Syria. *Business-review.eu* [online]. URL: <http://business-review.eu/news/3-4-million-romanians-left-the-country-in-the-last-10-years-second-highest-emigration-rate-after-syria-159038> [12.12.2018].
2. Bell, C. (1997). *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Caragiu-Marioțeanu, M. (1995). *Varietatea limbii române. Limba română și variațiile ei locale*. București: Editura Academiei Române.
4. Chiorean, L., Sigmirean, C. (2012). *Aspecte ale construcției identitare: onomastica. Cazul românilor din Transilvania sec XIX. "Petru Maior" University Press*. [online]. URL: <http://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/A22605/pdf>. [01.02.2019].

⁴ The existence of Romanian teaching schools, music and theater festivals, cultural journals published in Romanian or Romanian parishes has a very important role in the Romanian identity inventory of the Romanian diaspora. (Olaru Nenati, 2007:823-836).

5. Etzioni, A., Bloom, J. (ed). (2004). *We are what we celebrate. Understanding holidays and rituals*. New York, London: New York University Press
6. Friedman, S. (Septembrie, 2018). The Struggle Over the Definition of Jewishness Is Now Existential. *Haaretz* [online]. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-struggle-over-the-definition-of-jewishness-is-now-existential-1.6490773> [01.02.2019].
7. Gavreliuc, A. (2011). *Psihologie interculturală: repere teoretice și diagnoze românești*. Iași: Polirom.
8. Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Rituals*. Chicago: Aldine.
9. Goffman, E. (1971). Supportive Interchanges. *Relations in Public*. New York: Basic Books.
10. Greilsammer, I. (2007). Réflexions sur l'identité israélienne aujourd'hui. *Cités*. 2007/1 (n° 29). 39-48.
11. Leach, E. (1968). Ritual. *International International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. London, vol. 13
12. Leucea, I. (2012). *Constructivism și securitate umană*. Iași: Institutul European.
13. Lupitu, R. (Noiembrie, 2018). Claudia Țapardel. Europarlamentarul Claudia Țapardel (PSD, S&D): "Centenarul reprezintă momentul în care trebuie să punem punct războiului românilor împotriva românilor". *Caleaeuropeana.ro*. [online]. URL: <https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/europarlamentul-claudia-tapardel-centenarul-reprezinta-momentul-in-care-trebuie-sa-punem-punct-razboiului-romanilor-impotriva-romanilor/> [03.03.2019].
14. Papalia, D.E.; Olds, S.W. & Feldman, R.D. (2010). *Dezvoltarea umană*. Bucharest: Trei.
15. Pahlavi, F. (2003). *Memorii*. Translated by Raluca Bucur. Bucharest: RAO
16. Olaru Naneti, L. (2007). Modalități de afirmare a identității culturale a românilor din străinătate. *Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”* [online]. URL: http://www.philippide.ro/Romani%20majoritari_2007/80_NENATI.pdf [03.03.2019].
17. Simion, E. (2015). Note subiective despre identitatea românească. Însemnări dintr-o lucrare în pregătire. *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu*, II. 17–31.
18. Sitaru, L. (2009). *Gândirea politică arabă. Concepte-cheie între tradiție și inovație*. Iași: Polirom.
19. Schifirneț, C. (2009). Identitatea românească în contextul modernității tendențiale. *Revista Română de Sociologie*. Vol. XX, nr. 5–6. 461–480.
20. Valentin, G. (Noiembrie, 2018). Dragnea: „Trebuie să încetăm acest război între români și români”. *Evenimentul zilei*. [online]. URL: <https://evz.ro/dragnea-razboi-romani.html> [03.03.2019].
21. *** (Mai, 2018). Am facut-o si pe asta: Marea Unire – târâtă în lupta anticorupție. *inPolitics.ro*. [online]. URL: https://inpolitics.ro/am-facut-o-si-pe-asta-marea-unire-tirita-in-lupta-anticoruptie_18439429.html [04.02.2019].
22. *** (Noiembrie, 2018). Clujenii sărbătoresc Centenarul cu proteste. *Turdanews.ro*. [online]. URL: <https://www.turdanews.net/articole/actualitate/58448-clujenii-sarbatoresc-centenarul-cu-proteste.html> [04.02.2019].
23. *** (2018). Centenarul Marii Uniri 2018. [online]. URL: <http://centenar.gov.ro/web/> [14.12.2018].