

ETHNICAL IDENTITY AND THE [RESERVATION OF VALUES IN MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES (CASE STUDY: DUDESTII VECHI, TIMIS COUNTY)

I.S. Dabu

Ileana Simona DABU

West University of Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: This article is based on the data provided by an actual research carried out in 2013-2014 in a multiethnic community in the Banat area, Timis County, namely in the village of Dudeștii-Vechi (Old Dudești). In this study, I have tried to find out from the inhabitants of the studied community what their perception of their own person is, but also of those who live with them. In this respect, I have developed and applied a psycho-sociological questionnaire, highlighting these aspects. Thus, in Dudeștii-Vechi, the number of questionnaires applied was 590, and they were applied to the following groups of people.

Keywords: concept of community; concept of interculturality; ethnic minority; national minority

Introduction

In the first writings and studies that sociologists have penned about the community, it is being described as "the living together of a group in a given, common space" (A.E. Popa, 2010, p. 18).

The concept of "community" has its origins in German Romanticism and it refers to a "global social entity in which the ties between its members are very strong, a supra-individual entity that prevails over singular beings. " (B. Zani, A. Palmonari, 2003, p. 37)

The community, initially considered a totality, a substantial entity by F. Tonnies, who also resembled it to society, is nowadays represented as a whole, composed of complex social relationships whose nature and orientations are analyzed in specific contexts.

The concept of interculturality suggests to cultural anthropology the need to carry out some ideological detached analyses and interpretations,

showing political neutrality and emotionless affection, of coexisting cultures" (A. Miha, 2002, p. 123).

The concept of national minority designates (J. Droz, 1960, p. 15) a certain part of a nation that lives within the borders of another national state, having the conscience of national identity and its own way of financing itself.

An ethnic minority is a part of an ethnic, peaceful, stateless nation which is recognized by other states, living in the borders of one or more national states (J. Droz, 1960, p.60).

Methodology

This article is based on the data provided by an actual research carried out in 2013-2014 in a multiethnic community in the Banat area, Timis County, namely in the village of Dudeștii-Vechi (Old Dudești). This community is the largest community in Timis County which has a majority of ethnic Bulgarians. Besides these, ethnic Hungarians and Romanians live peacefully together (Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2014).

The study started from the following objectives:

- the description of the ethnically specific peculiarities and the cultural differences between the ethnic groups in terms of the cultural model (traditional vs. allogenic);
- identifying a set of values on which the social life of rural communities is based upon, and attitudes towards these values in the villages of Banat (multi-ethnic communities in Timis County);
- identifying the forms of cultural and inter-ethnic relations between the Romanian population and the various ethnic groups in Banat (Timis County)

In this study, I have tried to find out from the inhabitants of the studied community what their perception of their own person is, but also of those who live with them (Gavrilă-Ardelean, Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2014). In this respect, I have developed and applied a psycho-sociological questionnaire, highlighting these aspects. Thus, in Dudeștii Vechi, the number of questionnaires applied was 590, and they were applied to the following groups of people, and namely: 330 questionnaires were applied to the Bulgarian ethnic group, 85 questionnaires were applied to the Hungarian ethnic group and 175 questionnaires were applied to the Romanian population.

The psychosociological questionnaire "Who am I" comprises 18 items, being structured on several aspects, namely: personal identity / national identity, interethnic relations, values and attitudes, factual data, being based on M. Kuhn's 20 questions test "Who am I?".

Personal identity / national identity includes the items by which both Romanians and other ethnic groups (Bulgarians and Hungarians) must self-

characterize and characterize the locals belonging to other ethnic groups, as well as the characterization of the other ethnic groups at national level.

Ethnic relationships include the items through which the questioned subjects have choose, from a set of values, the values that define their life expectations (terminal values) and from a personal perspective (instrumental values), as well as the importance classification of the main social factors.

Results

When we have to say who we are, we become restrained. We are not at all sure of the qualities and defects we have, and we often tend to place in the negative category certain attributes of quality, from the desire to show that society has become degraded and moral valuea are just obstacles in today's society. In the following, we will see how the locals surveyed in DudeștiiVechi, Timiș County, characterize themselves.

In DudeștiiVechi, most Romanian males are characterized by the following attributes: good householders (90 persons), proud (83 persons), generous (82 persons), hardworking (81 persons) and few men characterize themselves as mean (15 persons), ill-wishers (10 persons), selfish (12 persons), indifferent (9 persons).

The women of DudestiiVechi considered themselves as proud (75 people), good-looking (65 people), good householders (72 people), benevolent (70 people), but also hardworking, honest, generous, and good-hearted. There are also Romanian women from DudeștiiVechi who admit that they are indifferent (12), stingy (10), selfish (7), hostile (5).

The Bulgarian men in DudeștiiVechi characterize themselves as honest (181), hospitable (175), hardworking (160), good-natured (137), proud (115), but also avaricious (25), hostile (41), selfish (41) and indifferent (13), and these last four attributes are aknowledged by very few respondents.

If we refer to Bulgarian women in DudeștiiVechi, the highest number of answers cited these attributes: good householders (112), honest (112), good-hearted (107), generous (103), proud (100) , and the lowest number of responses backed these attributes: hostile (31), selfish (17), avaricious (15), indifferent (10).

More than 30 responses have the following attributes that characterize the Hungarian men of DudeștiiVechi: proud (40), hardworking (39), cocky (33), goof householders (32), good-hearted (31) and less than 8 answers had the attributes: avaricious (7), hostile (5), selfish (2), indifferent (4).

Unlike Hungarian males, the Hungarian women from DudestiiVechi who answered the questions in the questionnaire were fewer and, according to their answers, most of them perceived themselves as hard-working (33), good-natured (26), generous (25), good-hearted (27), and proud (25).

Analyzing all of the above, we find that all persons questioned avoid describing themselves as avaricious, hostile, selfish or indifferent, perhaps being ashamed to do so. It is important that they realize that each person has both defects and qualities and they should assume not only their qualities but also the defects that they can turn into constructive aspects.

The second question in the questionnaire – “Who are?” (Romanians, Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, or other ethnic groups) - regarding the community of the respondent - is a strategic question, the answers help us to see whether or not there is any negative attitude among the different ethnic groups. In analyzing and interpreting the answers to question number 2, we start from the assertion that ethnic minorities in a community are often viewed with skepticism. There are few Romanians in Dudeștii Vechi who consider the Bulgarians in the community where they live as restrained, cold, unfriendly or hostile people. Most of them define these by attributes (words, expressions, sentences) such as: friendly (80 Romanian men and 57 Romanian women), down-to-earth (79 Romanian men, and 67 Romanian women), good neighbours (78 Romanian men, and 68 Romanian women). If men put values as friendship first, women see hospitality as the main virtue.

Nor do Bulgarians have a negative opinion about Romanians in Dudeștii Vechi, except for a few people who consider Romanians as cold, reticent, unfriendly or hostile (9 answers with negative characteristics).

The problems of Romanians with the Hungarians are not insignificant at national level, but at the community level, the Romanians in the Dudeștii Vechi perceive them as being especially hospitable people, good neighbors, sensible, family-loving, polite, good-hearted and friendly. 27 Romanians consider them to be cold people, 4 Romanian women see them as unfriendly, 3 see them as introverted / closed, and one Romanian considers them hostile.

The Hungarians in Dudeștii Vechi do not consider the Romanians as their enemies but, on the contrary, they regard them as good householders (41), good neighbors (40), good-hearted (42), friendly (39), kind (38), good-natured (37), hospitable (35) and even generous (38).

At the level of the analyzed community, Dudeștii Vechi, there are no ethnic conflicts or, at least, so seems to be the results of the applied questionnaires. This is a good thing, in this community we predominantly see peace, common sense, communication, harmony, friendship, helpfulness.

Thus, the assertion that ethnic minorities in a community are often regarded with skepticism does not fit the studied community, and this can only be seen with confidence and conviction that people are beginning to understand the meaning of the expression peer-equality or ethnic tolerance.

Question 3 is the same as question 2, but this time it is about the perception of other ethnicities not in the local community, but throughout the

country. We will see to what extent the answers to this question differ from those offered about the ethnicities in the community.

Romanians from Dudeștii Vechi have, for the most part, words of praise for Bulgarians who, according to the collected answers, are honest (70), good (67), hardworking (71), friendly (69), open (67), good-natured (77), sincere (68) and generous (87).

Asked to offer 5 words, sentences, expressions to express their opinion about Romanians in the country, Bulgarians have used positive attributes. Bulgarian women do not consider Romanian men as very hard-working, but rather see them as good, open, honest and generous people.

Despite the many national differences, Romanians from Dudeștii Vechi look at Hungarians with an open heart, attributing them qualities such as: honor, friendship, generosity, diligence, kindness, sincerity, openness and empathy.

The Hungarians from Dudeștii Vechi do not have an ostentatious attitude towards Romanians either, considering that the main characteristics of Romanians are: generosity, diligence and sincerity, this latter characteristic being predominant in the responses of Hungarian women.

We find that, from the point of view of the country's population, there are not many negative opinions about the different ethnic groups. This may be a consequence of the fact that the inhabitants of this community from Timiș County provided answers according to their relations with the other ethnic groups within the community, and that they cannot be influenced by the disparities existing at national level between different ethnical groups.

Marriage between subjects belonging to different ethnicities may be a real problem for the family of the two people who decide to take this step. Tradition could be one of the reasons for the dispute. 112 people agree with marriage between Romanians and Hungarians, 31 with that between Hungarians and Romanians and 103 with marriage between Bulgarians and Romanians.

From the answers of the inhabitants of the three villages of Timis County, pertaining to the commune of Dudeștii Vechi, we find that there are no real problems regarding the ethnicity of the young people who want to get married, which is as normal as possible in a society in which common values are promoted and not the differences or inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, education, etc. The same can be said about ethnic friendship, there being no disagreements between certain friendships.

From the category of terminal values we could mention: a comfortable life, an active life, the feeling of fulfillment, world peace, a beautiful world, equality, family safety, happiness, inner harmony, pleasure, salvation, self-esteem, friendship and wisdom.

These values reflect a person's preferences for what he wants to achieve in life, the goals he pursues throughout his life. For Romanians, the three most important terminal values are: self-respect (302 answers), family safety (275 answers) and comfortable life (251 responses). For Hungarians, the most important terminal values are: family safety (81 responses), pleasure (80 replies) and friendship (75 replies). For Bulgarians, their goals in life are: feeling of fulfillment (275 answers), self-respect (263 answers) and a beautiful world (259 answers).

Of all these answers, we conclude that self-respect and family safety are the most important terminal values for the people in Dudești Vechi. But people need to be encouraged to be wiser, in order to make the right choices, and to be friendlier, in order to be happy and to feel fulfilled.

The instrumental values reflect the means by which these objectives will be achieved, namely, how exactly we are going to reach what we want. To do this, a person needs to be: ambitious, open, capable, cheerful, clean, courageous, forgiving, honest, creative, independent, loving, responsible, friendly and logical. From a personal perspective, the three most important attributes for each of the ethnicities concerned are:

- for Romanians: ambition (390), logic (375), responsibility (370);
- for Hungarians: honesty (73), capability (71), responsibility (70);
- for Bulgarians: ambition (295), independence (293), responsibility (285);

Responsibility is a common value for these ethnicities. However, achieving these goals requires the knowledge of all these values and the implementation of plans based on them, also taking into consideration the habits and traditions of each community / ethnicity.

Conclusions

This study concluded that there is no Romanian ethnocentrism, but civic acts exercised in a pluralistic social space in which there were no significant asymmetries in the horizons of expectations of the different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities in the research area. Every fact of popular culture that we consider to belong to the region of Banat involves the decoding of some bi-unequivocal relations between Romanians, the so-called "Banateni", on the one hand, and the different populations established here: Bulgarians, Slovaks, Serbs, Hungarians, Germans and others, on the other hand. Each of these populations has been both the emitters and the recipients of a message made up of the culture of the native places and the place where they either stayed for a while or even settled. It is within these coordinates that a traditional folk culture has developed, one whose formula is deciphering the process of acculturation, but also the process of internal growth, in which, as a matter of fact, each

population has manifested its specific originality. Over time, a unique civilization has emerged in the Banat area, a civilization that is characterized by elements common to all ethnicities, as well as by individual features of each ethnic group.

References:

- Droz J. (1960). *Europe Centrale*. Paris: Payot.
- Gavrilă-Ardelean M., (2014). Developing The Rural Comunity. Valuing Local Traditions. Romanian Traditional Village. The Villages in Banat-Crișana Area, *JPE* 11(2): 157- 163.
- Gavrilă-Ardelean M., Gavrilă-Ardelean L. (2014). Habits in the romanian traditional community village. *Agora Psycho-Pragmatica*, 7 (2), 59-73.
- Mihu A. (2002). *Antropologie culturală*. Cluj –Napoca: Editura Dacia.
- Popa A.E. (2010). *Sat bogat. Sat sărac. Comunitate, identitate, proprietate în ruralul românesc*. Iași: Editura Institutului European.
- Zani B., Palmonari A. (2003). *Manual de psihologia comunității*. Iași: Editura Polirom.