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LIVING TOGETHER –ETHIC NORMS OF MINORITIES LIVING IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

We may say that the peaceful life in a village with a mixt population was preserved due tothe respect towards one's fellow citiyens, first of all, even if these had a language, a culture and a civilisation that differed from their own. Reciprocity in the moral conduct, the ethic rules and those of social behaviour preserved these values.

The great majority of the Romanians in Hungary have lived to a greater or smaller extent together with other ethnic minorities along their history. The fact has resulted in interethnic cultural influences and has imposed a certain behavioral conduct among individuals. Thus an unwritten ethic code of behavior was born which was rigorously observed by all members of the different ethnic entities which lived together. The cohabitation of the people of a different mother tongue has influenced their way of thinking, making them sensitive and curious to another culture, strengthening thus their linguistic, traditional and cultural tolerance. At the same time the critical spirit has become more acid, through comparison to the others' way of living, finding similarities and differences ceaselessly.

Even if the cohabitation of several nationalities has resulted in a change in the specific national costume, losing its most important ethic signs, several small elements have been preserved for a long time. Thus, one could tell on the basis of a person's looks what nationality they belonged to for a long time. For example, the Romanian women wore their hair plaited in two plaits set around their heads, while the Hungarian women would wear only one plait. The Romanian women wore a flat bun, while the Hungarian ones a pointed bun. Up to the 60s and 70s, the Romanian women did not cut their hair and would not walk around bare-headed. The Hungarian men would wear a hat, the Romanians a cap, the Serbs, a rounded cap. The Hungarians and Germans would wear trousers, while the Romanians wore men's white linen culottes (izmene) or wide white linen culottes (gaci). For a long time the Romanian women used to wear "a scarf around their head" (cârpă după cap) instead of a winter coat. These exterior signs of the clothing would oblige people that once in a community place, at the fair, wedding, shop a.s.o. they should behave according to the circumstances. For example, the Romanians of Micherechi, upon going to the fair in the neighboring village of Sercad, during the week, would dress into their Sunday best, would avoid speaking loud and initiate conversations at a distance, so specific to country folk, as well as they strived to communicate with people in their own language. The same respect was paid to the shopkeeper, the mayor,

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the railway man and all the clerical staff of the locality who were Hungarians by nationality, being employed in their positions, by the state with a specific political aim. Since they were not good speakers of Hungarian, their strive occasioned many ridiculous situations. Thus in most of the communes where there live minorities, a series of happenings are circulated up to the present day. In Chitighaz, for example, the following story is told:

"Long ago, the rich people would employ hands to work for them. Well, among them there were Romanians as well as Hungarians, mixed together. And they would get food daily.

Once they were given meat soup at noon. Immediately, the Hungarian served himself to all the meat, so the Romanian was left only with the stock to eat. After a while, when the Hungarian helped himself again to meat, the Romanian bare no more and hit him on his arm. And since he could not speak Hungarian well, told the other one who, naturally could not speak Romanian well either: "Ne báncsa clonţ! Mai horpotyi a zama!" (Keep your beak off! Slurp some broth!"

Another happening from Micherechi:

"Auntie Ană, wife of Buricoiu (Big Navel), went to the shop to buy "golund" (string) for her husband's underwear. Well, the shopkeeper, uncle Gyuszi, could not speak Romanian well. She kept thinking what the word for golund was in Hungarian and she finally asked for: "Kérek olyan hosszú, ami mozog a gatyába!" (Please give me that long thing which moves in the underwear."

In each Romanian community in Hungary, for the local people, the newcomers were vagrants. In Bedeu, such a vagrant is the Jew. He has other customs, he would dress differently and would comb his hair in a different style. The most impressive element was his long and curly hair. The Romanians would crop their hair short in order not to be mistaken for him. In Micherechi, the vagrants used to be the Hungarian Gypsies who came from other regions. Their careless, vivid clothing would make the Romanians consider their external appearance very important. Otherwise they were told "you look like Regina", a little Gipsy girl named Regina.

In order to fade away the distance between the two ethnic characteristics, and to surmount the language barrier, in order to express the belonging to the same community, the desire to live together, the Hungarians who had recently come to live in the village, especially those who came by way of marriage, would try to integrate into the new community as soon as possible, continuing to speak Hungarian, but intermingling Romanian words as well, during the first stage, especially the swear words: "May ill health enter his stomach! To hell with you!" (A betyesig álljon bele a gyomrába! A draku vigyen el!")

A not very becoming thing happened in Chitighaz, leaving traces in the Romanians' spoken language. The children of the believers would spy on the Jews living in the village, through the window, during their devine service. These, although they could speak both Romanian and Hungarian, would pray still in their mothertongue. „The strange sonority of Hebrew was perceived by them as a continuos <bruma-bruma-bruma> (the same as frost, in Romanian). Thus in Chitighaz the belief that the Jews are praying to frost, since their Jewish Easter falls when the first frost comes, was spread around. This explains the local appearance of the saying „He is muttering as the Jew when asking for frost.(He is mumbling, speaking to himself, unintelligibly)" (Mondrăneşte ca jidovii când cer brumă.). Although the proverb was used quite frequently, the people would be reluctant to use it in the presence of a Jew.

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The ethic conduct and the respect towards the ethnic differences, can be seen best in the practice of several customs. A brief selection will follow:

In Apateu, on the last Tuesday before Lent starts, the following tradition of Romanian origin was practiced. The main protagonists of this local tradition were the maids in waiting. "On that evening the lads would walk about the streets, in turn and would scatter feathers, chaff and would stamp these into the snow or mud, on the sidewalk, in front of the gates of the unmarried girls, so that they would have to clean up. They usually would make use of hen feathers, and would write on paper the following verses:

"Three baskets of feathers to your bed
And you stayed unmarried yet."

Since the Romanians in Apateu lived together with the Hungarians, the custom was also extended to the Hungarian girls, with the difference that they would write on their paper in Hungarian:

"Three baskets of feathers under your bed
In your mother's yard, you're still unmarried!"

In Săcal, where the Romanian and Hungarian children would play together, they would watch the storks at spring time, and when it flew above them, they would shout out in a chorus, sometimes in Romanian, sometimes in Hungarian:

"Stork, stork,
Bring us a new baby! (in Hungarian)
or
"There comes the stork bringing a newborn!"
or
"Stork, stork, little stork,
Bring a baby – that's your work!"

In Hungarian Cenad, where Hungarians, Serbs and Romanians would live together, the dance used to be organized separately: the Hungarian dance, The Serbian dance, the Romanian dance. Each ethnic group had a rich repertoire. Provided young people belonging to different ethnic groups visited one another, the musicians would first play the Romanian tunes, for example, at a Romanian dance, and then the Hungarians would follow: the czardas and the unguras. In Cenad, quite often, the Romanians would organize the dance together with the Serbs. In this case, first a series of Romanian dances would be played, and then a series of Serbian dances would follow. The verses were shouted by all the participants, sometimes in Romanian, sometimes in Serbian as all Serbs spoke Romanian, but even if not all Romanians could speak Serbian, they knew the verses well. The youth of the village, irrespective of their nationality would know all the dances, be they Hungarians, Romanians or Serbs. In Micherechi, the young people coming to the dance from a different village could join the party free of charge.

Being very religious, the Romanians would make the sign of cross when passing any place they considered sacred. In Săcal, "the p[people would make the sign of cross when the bells tolled, when passing by a church, near the cross at the end of the village, at the cross placed on the farm of Martonffy and the one near the cemetery, but also before sitting down at table." Although the Romanians in Săcal were Orthodox, they would cross themselves in front of the cross on Martonffy's farm, who was a Hungarian by origin. The explanation is that the Martonffy brothers had played an important role in the lifeof the villagers. They had travelled to America and upon their return home, they have put into practice their experience gained over there. They had taught the villagers how to

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cultivate the land in a modern way and that brought about wealth for the Romanian peasants in the village. The respect for the brothers was shown in that way as well.

Due to the different religions, the Orthodox and Catholic holidays would not fall at the same time of the year. Easter, for example, in mixed communities were celebrated once for the Hungarians, and once for the Romanians, at an interval established by the church. Although Easter would not always be celebrated with the same amplitude by the two ethnic groups, great care was taken that the sacredness of the event should not be disturbed through the daily routine of the other group. In other words, they would not work the fields, or wash, or drive their carts along the road in the village a.s.o.

By rapport a cultural hierarchy was established among the ethnic groups. Thus in Aletea, wherethere were five times more Germans than Romanians, where the German population consisted mainly of land owing farmers, while the Romanians had no possessions, the Germans considered themselves superior to the Romanians considered servents whom they would employ to work on their lands. Otherwise their opinion of the Romanians was they these were industrious people and trustworthy. In most of the cases, the relationship between the landlord and the servant was humane and satisfactory, but not one of equality. „In the house of the landlord, the servants would eat at a separate table, but received the same food as the lord's family." There were occasions when the landlord would behave as a dictator saying: „At noon, if you her that my penknife is closing, meaning that I have finished my meal, you are to finish eating as well!" These words were not uttered frequently, as the people knew the rule and would act accordingly. The same thing would happen in the case of the Romanians in the commune of Micherechi and of the Gipsies. The hired hands, although would work together with the rest, were fed separately at table: Gipsies on one hand, Romanians on the other. The Gipsies had separate cups for drinking water, cutlery and plates reserved only for them. The villagers wshowed more indulgence only towards the Romanian Gipsies from their commune. In an interview given to Izvorul magazine. Aunt Anuta of Deli, a Gipsy from the village, confessed that the people of Micherechi, would not refrain from her; she would be invited to sit at table with them: „Come here, Aunt Annie! God forbid, we are treating you as ourselves! Because we know what kind of people you are. You do not steal and do not walk around begging. You work just like ourselves, decently! (...) There were times when they would pick at us, but we also washed and washed our clothes properly!..."

Among Romanians it was considered unpolite to invite someone to your house and not treat one's guest to some food. The Gipsy, wether Romanian or Hungarian would never enter people's houses. If he had any problem with the master, he would call out at the gate until he came out of the house.. The Romanian would not be invited into a Gipsy's house either. Thus an embarassing situation was avoided, that of refusal. It was not becoming to eat or drink from a Gipsy. The Gipsies were invited into the house and served with cakes and brandy only as part of the carol singer's group., at weddings or other traditional feasts when they were the musicians.

On any occasion the plural, polite form was used when addressing the elderly people by the youth, or parents by children, strangers by the villagers. The Gipsy was always addressed in the singular, with the exception of the local Gipsies, who live din the same community. The Gipsies who were begging along the village, it was becoming to be offered some food, even if just a piece of bread. They were never sworn at or mocked at.

The Romanian citizens coming from Romania were approached with marked curiosity by the local Romanians. Between the two World Wars, the peasants living in the

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Western carpathians would come to the plains in carts which seemed strange to our villagers. They were welcommed in a friendly mannerd, and goods were exchanged. Their presence was at the same time a pretext for merriment as they also brought a dancing bear along. Their way of living, their way of talking seemed interesting. They were considered as belonging to their own kin. Their poverty brought about sympathy and compassion.

After the totalitarian regime in the two countries, Hungary and Romania, was overthrown, more and more Romanians came from farther away territories of the motherland in order to work as hired hands in the hothouses in Micherechi. The contact of the villagers with these people was benefic. If so far the tendency of the villagers was to spek exclusively the local dialect, mingling Hungarian words, or passing easily from Romanian to Hungarian, now they had to make efforts to spek literary Romanian in order to be understood by the newcomers. These young people have been integrated into the community quite soon as they marries young girls in the village. Their presence in the commune influences not only the language, through revitalisation, but has a positive effect on the traditions, customs and religious life as well (most of them belonging to the Pentecost denomination).

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