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The memory of symbolic indeterminations – the founding legends of Râşnov Citadel

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This paper retrieves elements and mechanisms of identity to be articulated in a symbolic inventory to the multi-ethnic community of Râşnov. Our aim is to identify the Transylvanian behavioral and attitudinal structures originating with the cohabitation of Saxons, Romanians and Szeklers. Our research points to the fact that the symbolic imaginary and the multi-ethnic cultural act are embedded in elements of local history and ethical culture and that they constitute a model to the moral experience, in the sense that it reconsiders the relations to the past, to the self and to the otherness. The axiological structures of this community have been identified through the involvement of the subjects in the legitimizing events, in the activated normative, symbolic, or pragmatic-intellectual memory forms.

Keywords: *founding legends, Râşnov, multi-ethnic community, symbolic patrimony, axiological structures*

1. Introduction

The objectives of this study pertain to a wider research which questions the configuration of a symbolic, patrimonial inventory of the following kind: "What do we take with us, what do we give up? What does the inheritance we receive and take on consist of?" (Martin 2006, 11). Problems of this sort recur ever more frequently in the context of the present society, exposed as it is to the perils of globalization. Therefore, we intend to identify moral and symbolic patrimonial elements, axiological structures to be found in the multi-ethnic community of Râşnov. We aim to restore identity models, historical, social or moral experiences, cultural and symbolic representations of the otherness and of the community consciousness. In addition to this, we propose to identify the mechanisms of collective memory operating in the acquisition of proper moral values and in their recognition by the others.

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The contentions of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on the *social frameworks of memory* underpin our research and its specific indicators. We have recognized the aspects of the *normative memory* in the rules, norms, and values, in the models / countermodels displayed by family, school, church, neighbors, colleagues, examples of behavior, or in events and facts which honor tradition. The evoked respondents helped us recover *symbolic memory* by telling of various identity labels, of heroes, commemorative events and of personalities; the various aspects of language – phrases, proverbs or sayings – together with dress, cultural or architectural codes associate symbolic memory with the *memory outside time*. This indeterminate memory is fuelled by stories on toponymy, by legends of place or of founding events, by the history of the place / community. We have also taken cognizance of the *intellectual memory* which produces images and rituals when they validate and practise interethnic cultural rapports (contamination, acquisition, adaptation) or when they devise strategies to maintain tradition, etc.

In what follows, we illustrate defining aspects of the symbolic memory at the level of narrative discourse, in the interviews conducted in 2007, together with Anca Buta, in Râşnov, where there still exist the forms of dialogue and the rules of dynamic cohabitation specific to multi-ethnic communities. The ethnic cohabitation of Saxons, Romanians and Szeklers has influenced the Transylvanian mindset, its behavioral norms, its set of beliefs and opinions, its attitudes toward community events, towards models and countermodels. By using the concept of multiculturalism, we have gained insight into the diversity and into the subtle mechanisms in which the idea of a complex community, in the sense of an *exemplum* "functioning across barriers of ethnic or of any other nature" (Buta and Ilie 2012, 331) is composed. It has been our intention to preserve the dilemmatic aspects of the symbolic patrimony. Thus, according to Caius Dobrescu (2006, 13), symbolic patrimony may be defined relative to a "representation of moral experience determined by features such as: *rivalry, disagreement, uncertainty, ambiguity* or *unpredictability*". We have concentrated on the moral life of the community in Râşnov, with an emphasis on clarifying its profound attitudinal and behavioral structures, rather than restating cultural moments and aspects of "indisputable clarity and moral intensity" which represent a unique answer to the tensions of the community history.

2. Toponymy

The questions posed were set to reveal the degree in which the inhabitants of Râşnov were familiar with the symbol of the name of their town. The answer triggered the recollection of the founding events of the citadel of Râşnov. Of all respondents, the Saxons gave the most accurate etymological accounts by connecting them organically to the story of the origins, thus demonstrating to be cognizant of the

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identity labels and of the whole symbolic complex: name, heraldry, legend, meanings:

> That's where our ancestors came from eight hundred years ago, from the Rhine, right? Auf den Rheinland, that's where they came from and they settled here, they settled in Râşnov; they settled where there was water, that's how it was done. And they climbed up the crests and there the Dacians saw that down there the rose hips were in bloom. And there were *rosen*, there were wild roses. And they said, it's written down in the chronicle: "This settlement shall be named ROSENAU", so it's taken after the roses down in the field with wild roses.
> *Is this how they made the citadel?*
> Well, the citadel was made in 1300, it's written, right? (R.M.)

The myth of the Teutonic knights and the counterfeit history of the communist regime blend in an ambiguous discourse which does not dissociate school education from the lore. The myth of the founding legend, the autochthonous archaic origins, the dramatic events of the personal past (deportation, expropriation, exile) and the nostalgic historical present add up to form a symbolic conglomerate.

Another respondent accounts for the toponymy in terms of the heraldic-historical symbolic complex:

> You know the history of Râşnov… you know that Râşnov was a wild rose field. That's why there are three roses on our tie, the symbol of Râşnov. On our folk costume, but only on men's ties.
> They came from Saxony in 1200, the Teutons, that's what they called them, they came up the Bârsă, cause the Bârsă is streaming downwards for as long as anyone can remember, cause Transylvania was once a sea, there used to be a sea right here millions of years ago, who knows all that... And they came along the river, up the Bârsă, and they saw this crest, where there's the citadel now... And just when they arrived, it was blooming... the wild rose, and from then on it remained a symbol. But they came, they went, they climbed up and they built the citadel. At first the citadel was built out of wood, and then they got the Saxons, the Saxons in the country and they populated the area. And they took out the wild roses and there was arable land everywhere. That was hard work, no joke about it. And it's from these wild roses that we got our coat of arms on our Saxon folk costume. ROSENAU, Rosnov how the Hungarians used to say. Rosnov, Râşnov, oh yes. You should know this is one beautiful history. And then the population started to come here: the Tatars set fire to our houses, they built again, they made it again from scratch, and then in 1400 something the citadel was made out of rocks, of boulders. Can you

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> imagine that! Carrying all those boulders by buffalo carriage! A hundred years they worked! (G.T.)

It is noticeable that the respondent fluctuates between the magic time of the origins ("Râşnov was a wild rose field"), the founding and civilizational time ("they took out the wild roses and there was everywhere arable land"), the historical time (chronological determination), the invasions ("the population started to come here: the Tatars set fire to our houses") and they regard the construction of the citadel as a label of local continuity ("the citadel was made out of rocks, of boulders"). The symbolic imaginary of the citadel recurs in all respondents, pointing towards their ties to the native land and to the founding moment. Subjectivity markers indicate the involvement of the respondent in the internal time of the narrative and their adherence to self-defining labels: "this is one beautiful history"; "set fire to our houses".

The rest of the respondents interpret toponymy differently, with their representations depending on contemporary personal experience. Modern man no longer reconstitutes the experience of their forefathers, but they explain toponymy and the history of the town rationally. The knowledge on toponymy Mrs. E.D., a history teacher, posses is rendered in historical discourse. It is this account that no longer relies on mythical time, but on a minute scientific reconstruction of history, of the documents used in the research *Handicraft and commercial traditions with the inhabitants of Râşnov / Tradiţii meşteşugăreşti şi comerciale la locuitorii din Râşnov* (1984).

The toponymy account of Mrs. K.G., a Hungarian ethnic living in Râşnov since 1973, holds to the same perspective of relegating mythical time. This respondent explains toponymy through her own knowledge experience:

> When I came to Râşnov by train it was August 19, I was looking for Chimica [...] I got off work and since I missed the train, I walked to the car station. There were cars still running in Brasov at that time. The street was full of roses. And I went home and I told my mother: "Mother, that town is full of roses, not white ones, but pink and red ones!" That's how they named the town Rosenau, Râşnov (it was still a village back then, as far as I can remember). (K.G./ E.C.)

By analyzing the interviews we have conducted with Saxons and Szeklers, we may well observe that both groups are cognizant of local legends and that they have acquired, often by identification with the dominant group, elements of symbolic-normative memory, thus reproducing the core of the founding story. We may conclude that the multi-ethnic group of the respondents legitimize through the *ontological narratives* exposed by Margaret Somers. They reactivate through the act of recollection aspects of employment, relationality, connectivity and selective

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appropriation. These *narrative* categories update self consciousness and they represent the protomodel of the *who we are* story, precondition to the *what to do* model.

When asked to account for the etymology of the name of the street "Dobricii," respondents evoke a short history of the old Romanian quarter. They answer the question "*What does the name Dobricii stand for?"* by tracing the Slavic origin of the word "dobre", which means "good place, good settlement, that's why it is the first settlement of people in Râşnov" (E.D.). The respondents have also coined a popular etymology: "There was this man, Dobre, he was a boyar whose name was Dobriceanu, and he was there, and only after that did they built houses on the Dobrice / *Did he have, was he the first to own the area*? / Well yes, he owned the whole area." (I.D.)

Stories about the streets, forests, Cheile Râşnoavei, Glăjerie and Valea Neagră, about the places connected to the daily activity of the Saxon ploughmen confirm the symbolic legitimation formula: "All these names testify to the existence of Saxons in Râşnov". Other toponimies, such as the toponimies of streets, point to the significant role the Saxons played in the history of the community of Râşnov and to the fact that they acquired the land they civilized:

> *Do you remember what the streets of Râşnov were called?*
> Yes, I know them all.
> *What was the name of this street?*
> This was *Langgasse*, the Long Street, all the way from the bulls to the mill there was one up, *AUBERE*, we were *Aubere*, and another one down, *Langasse*, now you have Florilor, then you had *Langgasse*. *Na wa die Neugasse*, *na wa die Brűck Gasse*, cause there were bridges on it, that's why they called it *Brűcken*, *Brűck Gasse*, na *wa der Marcktra, na wa die Reisgasse*, rice street, *da well die Műhl gasse*, mill street, the one leading from the Town Hall, that's right, the small one, where there are gypsies now (whispering) (R.M.)

The Saxon respondents cooperated in the reconstruction of street names, as it permeated a repositioning in an indeterminate time when history had not yet affected their cultural identity.

3. Community and town history

A few aspects of local history emerge from the answers the respondents provided. This study does not aim to collect purely scientific data, neither to correlate the obtained material to the ambiguous (Dacians/Teutons?) historical truth. Rather, it records elements of the imaginary stored in the symbolic collective memory, more

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specifically in the memory of symbolic indeterminations. It is both the Saxon and the Romanian respondents who talk about the history of the population. It must be mentioned that the Saxons remained in the old areas around the citadel and that it was them who imposed and managed order, as people who claim their rights as founders. A German ethnic respondent recounts the following:

> *when did the Saxons get the land...?*
> Since they came here! This is exactly what I told someone today: had there been Romanians first around here, then the Saxons would have been servants to the Romanians. Cause they say the Romanians have only been servants. If they came here as servants, can you change that? Look, girls, this citadel tells you everything. This citadel is saying... for one: if us three hide in the citadel, can we conquer Bran or Predeal? If we don't set off? Can we conquer? We take shelter there or we stay in the street and then this man comes to beat us up and we go in and lock the door. Do we want to fight them? The Saxons have not been a fighting or revolutionary people. Cause if there isn't a hill in a town [if there isn't a citadel], you know there's a citadel around the church in Cristian, in Harman, in Prejmer, there's no doubt about these things." (H.T.)

A Romanian respondent also tells of the Saxon settlement around the citadel; she makes certain the right of the first settler, although she does so in an indirect way, by mentioning the feudal privileges the Teutonic knights benefitted from in the thirteen and fourteen centuries. She then goes on to speak about the population in the area and about the civilizing events: the building of the citadel and of the church, placing a special emphasis on elements of historicity, proper to historiographic fiction (proper to the founding legend fiction):

> First of all, the Saxons got the central part because they came at the end of the twelfth–beginning of the thirteenth century. They were granted a lot of privileges, because you see, they came in certain circumstances, it was the period when the society was changing to the feudal German society, and then there were different contradictions, and then they came from the Rhine and it was king Andrew II who brought them here to guard the eastern and southern borders of Transylvania. They received privileges and they received land, and these were skilled people, they founded the Saxon village and they settled in the center and... and they built the church, right… for example, there's that narrow street when you're heading to the Promenade, there's this narrow street half a meter wide and there they used to take refuge to the citadel in times of trouble. But you can't deviate too much, can't you? You always have to stick to the point.

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In their account of the history of the Râşnov community, the Romanians mention descending the Dobrice, a founding event which continues the mythical moment of the Rosenau citadel founding. These stories complete the myth of origin and depict the ways in which the citadel was extended with the Romanian quarter streets. It should be noted that the respondent inserts pragmatic elements to control her divagations:

> those people had bread ovens, they said: "get the bread into the oven", and it was very nice. If you're paying attention, Anca, [emphasis, she draws the symbolic map of her native land], you should go to the Dobrice sometime, from where it splits in two, you remember where father Scurtu lived right there on the right, that's where it splits, you climb on the side of the Crişanului, it's a different world there, and then they got down because they were hard-working people, they got down.
> That was a good place, it had good surroundings, but they retreated there till they managed to buy land on Caragiale, Eminescu. Well, you know only after that did they become… in the beginning the Saxon guilds did not allow Romanians to join, they had to fulfill, one of them had to be of Saxon nationality, that's right; and then, step by step, there were a lot of guilds: the guild of the tailors, of the wood carvers, wheelwrights… each had its own status. (E.D.)
> What did it feel when you left Dobrice to move here?
> It was very hard because we were alone. And I used to look far away... I came from the woods to move to the field. There were no houses. It was just us and this neighbor... It was only then that the people started to come. [...] I saw a different world, I got down from the Dobrice, I saw it differently. (M.R)

The rupture with the birthplace triggers profound implications, the respondent emphasizing rhetorically the distance from the domestic matrix.

In personal recollections of childhood places, the respondents return to aspects of the history of the community and to the founding mythical scheme, stressing the topographic and symbolic differences between the Saxons and the Romanians:

> I was seven years old… what can I tell you? This center and the streets you see in front of you, these were it, this was Râşnov. And it was on Caragiale, cause that's what you call it now, yes, that was rice street, *Reisgasse* (says in pride).
> The Town Hall was in the city centre, where's Ibi's restaurant. But there was a Saxon mayor, cause there were two thousand people, there were only Saxons, very few Romanians. They stayed on the Dobrice, in those dumps and they were servants to the Saxons. That anyone can tell you. The Saxons were the ones who owned land. Well, they made it arable land. (G.T.)

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The status of the Saxon ethnics, seen as the elite, is reinforced by the fact that the respondents mention the premodern chronicles and the role of the Saxons as founders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; of all respondents, the Romanians resort to archaic tradition the most. The stories of the Romanian respondents enclose aspects of the indeterminate memory of Râşnov and of its community as imprinted in the legendary memory. The respondents form a solid *community memory* bound by the founding toponymical stories or, in Pierre Nora's terms, by the *lieux de la mémoire*. The three narratives of the respondents function as legends of the major founding events, of significant places in the lives of the individuals and of the community.

4. Legends of the places, founding events

The mechanisms of memory do not dissociate the symbolic aspects from the historical truth presented at school or by various ideologies of the political regimes. Is is for this reason that the respondent merges the toponymic history of the settlement into the founding history.

Mr. Treutsch tells of a story from the time of the invaders. The Saxons, retreated to their site of shelter, decide to give in to the enemy. "The men wanted to surrender, but a woman said: 'we are not giving up. We are going to cut our last pigs, bake pies and give them to the attackers'. When they saw that it was pouring with food, they said: 'If there's enough for us too, we're out!', they got scared and they turned back" (H.T.). Apart from its humoristic dimension, this episode becomes legendary through the symbolic aura and through the temporal indeterminateness of the events.

Most of the Romanian respondents are well acquainted with another legend on the Cheile Râşnoavei. One of the subjects emphasizes that in 1912 A.D. Xenopol sums up in his notes on the wanderings in the lands of Râşnov "how he travelled to Colții Cheii and the story of the three emperor's daughters who jumped off the cliffs to escape the Turks, saying «better to the fish, than to the Turks». And, of course, there was the erosion of the rain which darkens, like blood, I mean, well it's the three emperor's daughters, who, you know, sacrificed themselves" (E.D.). This is an etiologic legend which assigns the darker colour of the Cheile Râşnoavei rocks to a sacrificial event, reminding of the invasions of the migratory people and their imprint on the community.

Another respondent, a Roma ethnic, annotates the legends with several elements of the fantastic. She mentions the

> girls who jumped off there and you can see on the rocks... the blood, yes. There were the ovens the midgets had, the midgets made bread there. It's

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> exactly like an oven. If you ever cross that road you should take a look! Yes, it's true! My father used to tell me so, my grandfather, my great-grandfathers told me that's true what's on the tip of the Cheile!!" (A.F.).

A differentiating aspect is constituted by the fact that the Szeklers, unfamiliar with the legends of Râşnov, have recollected the legends of their homelands. This particular respondent recounts the legend of the citadel-like Crisbav rocks and, despite the fact that Râşnov has become their home, the connection with their origins becomes discernible. The respondent is an outsider because they do not identify with the collective symbolic imaginary of the autochthonous people in Râşnov:

> In our Crisbav too, they say we also had a citadel, not like this one though. It was made of boulders, this big, so they were basically cliffs and the cliffs had a small split and you would enter the citadel there and inside there were rooms. Cause for example my brother and these naughty little boys got in there, you know. When I was at the citadel I wanted to go in too, but I didn't dare though, I didn't go in because it's only a small split, you know. And then they said that... that in reality mermaids lived there... a legend... in Crisbav, who were, how can I tell you, they went to Codlea, you've seen Codlea, haven't you, well... they crossed Crisbav to Codlea in some sort of underground tunnel." (V.D.)

The mechanisms of symbolization are reactivated in stories and legends, albeit that tradition is deformed by forgetting. If significant, iconic elements could not contribute to the legitimizing narrative, respondents recomposed or reinvented the story.

5. Conclusions

Our analysis has focused on aspects of the common fund of the symbolic imaginary, with an emphasis on the identity labels of the multi-ethnic community in Râşnov. Moreover, we have intended to highlight cultural representation common to the memory of otherness and to the symbolic memory of the inhabitants of Râşnov. In doing so, we have abstracted elements of symbolic communication through language, through the valences of multilingualism, of traditional wisdom comprised in proverbs or sayings, and by evaluating defining elements of complex cultural codes (dress or architectural labels).

Throughout our research, we have observed that the symbolic imaginary and the multi-ethnic cultural act are embedded in elements of local history and ethical culture, and that they represent legitimizing force, complex community experience,

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emotion on recollection, intellectual contentment and, not in the least, a remodeling of the moral. The information gathered reveals that the symbolic patrimony constitutes a model to the moral experience, in the sense that it reconsiders the relations to the past, to the self and to the otherness. The respondents demonstrated through their stories that they have maintained a harmonic cultural communication, both by respecting their own tradition and by adapting to the norms of the otherness.

We have identified elements of the spiritual patrimony in order to retrieve the symbolic-axiological structures of the social imaginary and behavior of the community. Identity models have been restored by the involvement of the subjects in the legitimizing events, in the activated normative, symbolic, or pragmatic-intellectual memory forms. We have thus managed to recuperate histories of the place which acted as catalysts for the remembrance of identity labels and self-defining codes.

We have concerned ourselves with a reactivation and a re-inventory of a tradition which is being recollected spontaneously either during the holidays, either through the artisanal cultural memory exercises initiated by the local authorities. It is solely through interventions which try to preserve or to restore the last forms of the presence of an "ethnically and religiously plural identity, in a town industrialized during the communist regime, which underwent professional colonization, a town which has been engaged in an ongoing process of 'Romanization' from the interwar period, as Nicolae Iorga stated" (Buta and Ilie 2012, 331).

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