REDISCOVERING NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH NATIONAL LANGUAGE

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Abstract: One of the essential elements of the national heritage is the national language- our mother tongue- which represents the preserver of the national spirit that Iohann Gottfried Herder focused on and which is the identity value that we all must cherish. On the social level, our national language operates upon reality while on the psychological and cultural levels it feeds our identity. In a normal, healthy, society this phenomenon is common sense but in the area of the so-called "ex-communist" countries it has been deliberately affected, as programmed, and now it needs to be rebuilt as well as the civic attitude or the civil society. Vibrating when one hears the national anthem is normal, knowing its lyrics is normal, too. What then can we call the lack of respect and minimum decency? The lack of such feelings and reactions can be translated as what? How can we interpret these facts? Normally, we should associate our national song with the most representative symbols and concepts of our cultural identity and our national language with our most valuable part of our heritage. When we do not do this, are we simply ignorant? That is why we should implement the "programme language" in order to counteract the effects of the past Soviet Communist Programme of identity dissolution as well as the present phenomena of globalization in the form of "Americanization" or even "MacDonaldization" which are affecting most of the members of the young generations. The implementation of such a "programme language" could really help the youngsters and all the others rediscover and cherish, respect and preserve our national identity which is culturally vital.

Keywords: national spirit, cultural identity, language, heritage, programme language, patriotism.

Motto:

'*Government can and must play a major role in the renewal of civic culture'*
Anthony Giddens

Being specific to conscious beings, identity is real when the members of the group/society are able to distinguish

it from other groups and also to *' convey its distinctive character in words, gestures and practice so as to reassure themselves that it should exist and that they have reason to belong to it. Thus the emergence of a national identity involves a growing sense among people that they belong naturally together, that they share common interests, a common history, and a common destiny*.'[1]These are, as we know, the defining characteristics of nations, old and new, cultural or political.

The search for an 'identity' is of increasing importance in modern politics. '*The great strength of the nation-state is that it (really) offers the prospect of both cultural cohesion and political unity. When a people who share a common cultural or ethnic identity gain the right of self- government, community and citizenship coincide*.'[2]

Conservatives and communitarians argue that modern individualism, characterized by an abstract and an internationalist view of citizenship, has problems in capturing the loyalty of ordinary people. Therefore, '*the concept of identity defines one of the major points of confrontation between liberal-individualist worldview and its conservative or communitarian opponent*.'[3] Thus *'the debates surrounding the concept of identity are of*

[1] Roger Scruton, *Dictionary of Political Thought*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, New York, p.316
[2] Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, Palgrave mac Macmillan, London, p.123
[3] Roger Scruton, *op. cit*.,p.316

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importance for another reason, for they involve an attempt to understand and come to terms with the new of social order, in which religion is dwindling, social and physical mobility increasing, and the local character of town and country eroding.'[4] That is why we could say that, on some views '*nationalism involves a longing, in these new and trying circumstances, for an identity which will be a sufficient* foundation for political loyalty, and will be defined not in terms of religion or status but in terms *of place'*[5]

Nowadays we see that political action *'places the pursuit of identity at the top of its agenda, believing that no political programme can be successfully carried out if people do not first know who and what they are, and why they should take one another's interests so much into account as to ponder a common cause and a common allegiance*.'[6]

Another perspective on the problem of identity is given by the philosophy of language which mingles with the metaphysics of truth and the relationship between signs or symbols and objects. Much philosophy, especially in the twentieth century, has been informed by the belief that '*philosophy of language is the fundamental basis of all philosophical problems, in that language is the distinctive exercise of mind, and the distinctive way in which we give shape to metaphysical beliefs. The philosophy of language thus mingles with the philosophy of mind, since it needs an account of what it is in our understanding that enables us to use language'*[7]

As we all know, the essence of politics is represented by the argument between principles and theories of society. As a consequence, *'language is to politics as oxygen is to air, its vital and distinct ingredient (while) perception of the realities of politics is shaped by the structure and emotional power of language. Words do not merely describe politics, they are part of the politics they describe. It can be argued that almost every choice of word, in most of the discourse we emerge in, is a political act*.'[8]That is why we could say that today speaking correctly our mother tongue proves our civism and even patriotism and not merely a certain level of education. '*The study of politics, like politics itself, is thus in large part a contest over words, a language game. Mao Zedong, who said that-political power grows out of the barrel of a gun-saw the" little red* objectives *book" of his thoughts as more important than bullets in achieving his communist*.'[9] *As a rule, in political propaganda,' politicians invariably try to manipulate people through their use of language and engage in "double-speak". '*[10]

In the extremely complex context created by the phenomena of globalization, '*there is a tendency for "big" languages (of which English is the biggest on a global scale), to eradicate smaller ones….This tendency is offset by both migration and deliberate policy.*'[11]To some degree there is always a " politics of language" in the modern multilingual society, because ' *questions of educational resources, the language of bureaucratic and legal procedures, and the control of the mass media are bound to arise(…)The political dimension of language raises complex and, ultimately, mysterious questions. Questions of culture, identity, and manipulative power are inseparable from linguistic structures. Language sometimes seems definitive of identity, at other times almost irrelevant*,'[12] yet always remember that language is not separable from political reality. In the case of

[4] *Ibidem*
[5] *Ibidem*
[6] *Ibidem*
[7] Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p.203
[8] Iain McLean, Alistair Mcmillan, *Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p.300
[9] *Ibidem*
[10] *Ibidem*
[11] *Ibidem*
[12] *Ibidem*,p.301

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Romania, national identity is inseparable of language and the present crisis of the Romanian national spirit can be solved with the help of culture and education, in general, and with the one of the language, in particular as language is not separate from the political reality of a nation and state but part of its reality.

As a symbol of social identity, national language came to have increasing political importance with the rise of nationalism, so that the existence of a common language is now often thought to be an important precondition of political identity. In this part of Europe, the formation of national states, after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, took language as its starting point.[13] In the present moment, cultural conservatism is '*apt to defend the existing language as the embodiment of moral, spiritual and aesthetic values*.'[14] Cultural conservatism represents a species of conservatism characterized by the emphasis on the continuity of a culture, both as good in itself, and as a major cause of social and political stability. Cultural conservatism involves a belief in the power of the consciousness to determine political order, and thus stands opposed to most of the materialist visions of history. The main idea is "If we do not conserve culture, what else can we conserve?" In the case of Romania, traditional culture is extremely important for the preservation of our ancestral heritage, both spiritual and material, capable of defining national identity. In our case, the role of culture could and should be real in determining the quality of life *'not just of those who possess it, but also of those who do not.*'[15] Matthew Arnold in "Culture and Anarchy", 1869, spoke about culture as the repository of "light", as the guarantee that we may still pass on to future generations the inheritance of social order and true human values. Thus culture can represent the antidote to anarchy and can contain *'within itself the refutation of utilitarianism, and of every other doctrine expressive of the philistine consciousness*'.[16]

National language, the common language of all the citizens of the nation state, is the key to nationality since it relates people to history, legend and territory in the way that defines nation. *'This triadic relation between language, territory and myth/shared experience constitutes probably the most coherent and developed theory of nationality*,'[17]in particular cultural nationality. Nationalists are seeking to maintain cultural identity. The general feature of universal principles of nationalism is an assertion of the primacy of national identity over the claims of class, religion, or other criteria. I. G. Herder developed an influential philosophy of history, and a view of language '*as expression, according to which the language of a people encapsulates not only its common experience but also its historical identity and an underlying consciousness of unity. This unity is expressed through cultural artifacts, but it is also in part constituted by them*. Language is therefore seen as the repository of all that is distinctive of and precious to the group *who speak it*.'[18] Herder also speaks about "the Spirit of the People" (Volksgeist), a term created to give *'theoretical foundation to the nationalist position, by arguing that each people has its own "spirit", from which language, customs and institutions emerged organically, and which constitutes the real bond of unity among them*.'[19]

Language represents *'the fastest and most effective means of coagulating the interest of society. Starting from the role of the mother tongue, at the basis of any cultural asset, Herder promotes the idea of self-awareness of a people. According to such understanding,*

[13] Roger Scruton, *op.cit*. p.379
[14] *Ibidem*
[15] *Ibidem*, p.158
[16] Matthew Arnold, apud Roger Scruton, *op.cit*.,p.521
[17] Iain McLean, *Op. cit*.,p.363
[18] Roger Scruton, *op.cit*.,pp.296-297
[19] *Ibidem*,pp.724-725

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language is the materialization of a people's soul, of its character, ethno-national conscience being indistinct from it.[20] The philosopher's interest is to show the merits of language, not as the simple means of communication, but particularly in the original creation of an ethno-culture. The relationship between Volk (people) and language is considered indebted to the great poets, good writers, and wise men shaping the thought of society: "*Learn thus to know your language and attempt to prepare it for poetry, for philosophy and for prose.*"[21] The reason? This is the only way to learn how to think, the only way to equal the genius of language with the genius of a nation. Nobody can ignore a language as soon as he/she tries to understand the literature of a people.[22]

Insisting on the role of mother tongue, Herder takes another step towards defining his own political conception. '*Each of us has a broad perspective upon the world through the intermediation of mother tongue*, he noted. *Mastering the words is an indicator that human 'daring' shall never turn into "lawlessness"*.[23]

Malina Ciocea, in her book entitled "Cultural Security. The Dilemma of Identity in the Global World", presents a new concept-solution to the problem of national identity as a component of national cultural security that she calls "programme language". She insists on the idea that, in a nation, problems of national identity can generate national insecurity. She also says that the creation of coherent and institutionalized mechanisms to defend national culture and language are fundamental. Thus she makes a courageous connection between the cultivation of language and the processes through which national security is assured. This happens as the national language not only reflects values but creates social significance because having a language means that you belong to a culture, your language mediates between conceptual space and social space.[24] Concepts are reflected in the meanings of words, sometimes in an imperfect way, because to the primary senses, in the social context and social practice, "polluted" elements are added, which cause distortion. In this process, the national language degenerates/wastes away, being incapable to clearly reflect the value. One solution could be to use language to influence concepts through the cultivation of good senses/meanings of words, the ones which reflect the words that will strengthen the relation between the words and concepts. The result will be the attachment towards concepts. Education is to do this, in particular patriotic education based on a solid cultural background.

The solution offered by Malina Ciocea is "the programme language" seen as a valuable instrument to influence reality and to ensure security to the valuable models, by creating attachment to them. This programmed language aims at elevating the awareness of the system and of each citizen towards the values contained in the language and at the same time the responsibility to respect it as a national asset. Through the cultivation of a good language we can implement valuable concepts and create real sources of authority. As a consequence, we can rebuilt the relation, so deeply affected by the "communism\totalitarianism", between the socio- linguistic level and the ideal one. At one level national language operates upon reality while at the deeper, psychological level, it feeds national identity. This is what we all need! A renewal of the mind and of the soul! We can get that if we insist on our symbols of identity, if we educate our young generation to have respect for the real values of this people before using other symbols and values. Government should develop such a policy of real national education which, by

[20] Victor Neuman, *Conceptually Mystified: East-Central Europe Torn Between Ethnicism and Recognition of Multiple Identities*, Enciclopedica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p.88
[21] I.G.Herder, apud. Victor Neuman, *Op.cit.*,p.88
[22] *Ibidem*
[23] *Ibidem*, p.87
[24] Malina Ciocea, *Securitatea Culturala.Dilema identitatii in lumea globala*, Tritonic, Bucuresti, 2009,p.135

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implementing symbols of national identity could give each of us a life based on more respect and dignity. The study of Romanian History, Romanian Geography, of the Romanian Language, of real, traditional, representative Romanian Music, of Legends and Ballads about national Heroes and Martyrs and so on in order to have the chance as in the story of the two old people who asked God to show them their Soul…If we only had the chance to see our Soul, our real values, we wouldn't behave like blind people…

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