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Communitarian resilience confronting with personal and social historical ruptures

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Abstract

Our research is focused on the topic of traumatic identity in confrontation with personal and social historical ruptures, imposed by deportation in the communist period. We have realised and analysed 28 oral history interviews (1590 pages of transcript manuscripts) using a content analysis combined with values scale realized by M. Rokeach. The outcomes suggest the strength of individuals for reconfiguring in a positive way their own identities, activating communitarian resilience. The mechanism of reconstruction self-identity expresses the predominance of the values which would integrate in the register of “to be”, to the detriment of the “to have” values. Although the discourses reveal a world gravely and sometimes irremediably broken up, the authors of the discourses construct a narration which read through the axiological register is predominantly serene just because these value categories of “to be” are predominantly invoked.

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1. Life history and the traumatic self – a qualitative approach of social identities

Our research is articulated around the topic of traumatic identity, attempting to enlarge the horizon of the identity knowledge toward the realm of the *silent world*, toward the second-plan actors of history, so often ignored when self-reflexive surveys have been carried out and only *the pursuit of the forefront actors* has been preferred. We

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will resort to a privileged way of identity journey – “the life history” – regarded as a genuine way of *producing identity live* (Kaufmann, 1998, p. 246), in which *the confessing subject becomes a kind of concentrate of the social world*, with all its hopes and failings (Elias, 1991). It is proper to abandon the so-called break between the objective and subjective by understanding the social and interactive nature of the identity construction (Bertaux, 1997). Consequently, he who approaches this world is forced to understand that he enters a *three-pole game* (Kaufmann, 1998, pp. 240-241). It implies the researcher’s empathic participation, the enjoyment and almost therapeutic unburden of the subject, and the living and permanently rebuilt relationships with his life, that becomes an identity belonging for he who produces the discourse as well as for the one who is listening to him. There is no more place for epistemological detaching, self-sufficiency or superior considerations.

Thus, *the meaning can be understood only in relation with the other* who is properly considered not as a localizable and classifiable object, but also as a partner in the mutual negotiation of identity. He becomes an active subject who communicates, by means of shared symbols, with another equal subject (Rostaş, 1985), beside whom he starts getting used to the “taste of the journey” among the interwoven destinies (Kaufmann, 1998, p. 248). In this way, we will briefly outline the itinerary of such an identity journey by a sample of interviews taken from the *Archive of the Cultural Anthropology and Oral History Group* of “The Third Europe” Foundation in Timișoara, investigated over the last decade. It has offered us the opportunity to meet such a rich and ardent world by which we shall strive to catch a collective portrait of a generation that has faced so many breakings of history. Certainly, *this portrait has rather a heuristic value*, because of the limited samples and the inevitability of catching only one Romanian cultural area – Banat – and only one generation – adults born after 1930. We will try to clear up the tone and the essence of this journey toward the “self” and the “other” alike by examining the resources of memory’s source. Retrieving these fragments of life reunited in a coherent ensemble, to which the subject confers referential values and significance, we will have access, by means specific to oral history, to *the formation of the self as a process* in this confrontation with the conditionings, often tragic of the social background and history (Todorov, 1998). As the American interactionism has also asserted, the narrative structure hides an argumentative structure in which the identity discourse folds on dialogue logic. The life story assigns a part to the individual in the arena of life and also to the larger groups that have participated in the shaping of the personal destiny. Being an *ultimately founding discourse*, the life story constitutes a defining staging of the individual and group identity, which projects the ideology, mentality and communitarian standards and values into a new and clarifying light (Vultur & Onică, 2009). In other respects, following the manner in which the clarification of the self is achieved in this social game, K. Gergen introduces the term *self-narrative*, by which the subject remakes his past, assembling his past experience in a whole, as balanced as possible. Becoming a narrator of his own life, the subject acquires a feeling of his unity and establishes a network of referential events by which the present identity appears as a *dénouement* of his life story (Gergen, 2009).

2. Description of the research

In our research we have correlated outcomes provided by a classical content analysis with the application of a value scale through the matrix technique and we have covered the following research stages of the archive social documents (Chelcea, 2010):

- 1. Choosing the research theme and establishing the material for analysis aims at catching the image of the “self” / the “other” of the Banatians. The documentary sources we have resorted to are those constituted by the Archive of the Group of Cultural Anthropology and Oral History of “The Third Europe Foundation”.
- 2. The sampling permitted the selection of the most relevant and complex interviews, both in terms of their extent, therefore information, and also in terms of the intensity of the story, out of the 400 interviews currently contained by the archive. The selection has stopped at 28 interviews (majority of them realized by ourselves), including 1590 pages of transcript manuscripts.
- 3. Choosing the units of analysis and carrying on the research: implies the operationalization of M. Rokeach’s social value scale, supplemented by a content analysis. Thus, a series of parallel value portraits of the population investigated may be constructed (according to different criteria: level of instruction, age-group, ethnicity etc), facilitating the access toward a multi-thematic comparative approach. The quantitative processing has constituted only the primary stage of data interpretation. Thus the main *referential criteria* of the retrospective discourse have

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