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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

been isolated, localized in 20 included categories which in their turn have been regrouped into 3 large thematic areas: Individual, Community / Society, Culture <see table 1>.

Table 1 - Referential criteria resulted from content analysis

INDIVIDUAL	COMMUNITY / SOCIETY	CULTURE
S = „self”.	Fam = „family” (as a group or as a relation with a member of the family group).	Sb = celebrations (“rugă”, “chirvai”, “nedee”, “fârşang”).
EmV = major events in life (birth, baptism, marriage, moving house, employment, retirement, death, burial).	CatS = social categories (peasant, clerk, craftsman, dealer, intellectual, student, officer).	Rel = religion (church, religious practice, faith).
P = personalities (a member of the family – individualized -: friend, priest, teacher, mayor).	SfEc = economic sphere (craftsmanship, commerce).	VCt = quotidian life (entertainment, dance, ball, fashion, sport, club, evening party, performance, film, theatre, music, choir, brass band).
C = the “other” ethnic (German, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Gipsy); regional (Moldavian, Oltenian, Bessarabian).	Aut = authority (army, police, security, town hall, prefect’s office).	Ed = education (“school;” and educational code, kindergarten, school with private teachers, primary / secondary / high school, university).
Ac = „home”.	CatP = political categories (communist, iron-guardist, liberal, national-peasant, social-democrat, SS-ist).	
Căl = journey.	DsP = political and social discriminations (exploitation, collectivisation, class struggle).	
D = destiny.		
EvTr = traumatic events (deportation, emigration, prison, exile).		
LR =reference places (village / town, district, street, public house).		
M = work.		

The referential criteria have been correlated with the three-level value categories of Rokeach’s social value scale <see table 2>, aiming at: the *popularity* – the number of options for each value, and *variety* – the number of axiological references for different referential criteria.

The mentions of values as part of the discourse have been kept, achieving a hierarchical system, as well as a combination with the main referential criteria, aiming at the *association affinities* between the two registers (axiological / referential). Certainly, the technique of the content analysis enforces the association of the expert group technique, and we have operated with it (Iacob, 2004).

Table 2 - The Rokeach (1973) value scale is structured on three levels, as follows:

- values of maximum generality (level I):	- low generality values, depending on the latent potential or manifest of the respective value (level III):
VI = instrumental values;	Fo = orientative action values;
VF = finality values;	Fe = effective action values;
- average generality values (level II):	Rd = disposition relation values;
F (faber) = action values;	Ra = active relation values;
R = social relation values;	Av = self-achieved values aimed at;
A = affective satisfaction values;	Ae = effective self-achievement values;
S = affective satisfaction values.	Se = expected affective values;
	Sd = acquired affective satisfaction values.

### 3. Results and discussion

In a primary interpretation of data, our attention is drawn by the predominant positive tonality of the retrospective excursus (513 mentions for the positive values and only 374 for the negative values),

despite the traumatic character of the destinies evoked in most narratives. The resulted group image reveals us a pole dispute between the values of “being engaged in activity, of work” (v6), much appreciated (influence point =  $\pi_i > 100$ ), and those which express “suffering” (v37,  $\pi_i > 60$ ), perceived as extremely present. The influence threshold 60 is also reached by other two negative values, “sabotage of the other” (v16) and “unpretentious conditions, poverty” (v21), but the total of the other value influences determines the prevailing of the positive tone discourse. The tonality of referential criteria shows us, on the superior generality level, the prevailing of the criteria centred on the “Individual”, to the detriment of those focused on “Community / Society”, “Culture” respectively.

At the subordinated generality level we can observe the way the nucleus of the social representation is built around the discursive anchor of “the family” with the most numerous positive references ( $\pi_i > 120$ ); the only criteria which can compete with family being the “self” criterion ( $\pi_i > 100$ ), and the “other” criterion ( $\pi_i > 100$ ) respectively, both oriented positive, and the criterion oriented negative – predictable through its memorial charge – “traumatic events”, where  $\pi_i > 100$ . If we treat these criteria distinctly, we can observe the positive projections on the “self”, confirming the egocentric construction of personality in a group context, although the collective actor investigated writes his retrospective scenario in the dramatic register. The above mentioned observation confirms the research in the field of social experimental psychology, which renders evident the role of appreciative projects on the “self”, with a view to acquire and preserve self-esteem (Baumeister, 1999). At the same time the “other” remains a strongly polarized criterion, in which the positive and negative evaluations exceed the  $\pi_i > 80$  threshold, which suggested us the need of shading the criterion in the future stages of the research; in the present form, the criterion is not sufficiently relevant. In other words, the “other” category is too diverse to be included in only one variable. Thus, it has been observed that a significant differentiation occurs between the “other” ethnic (“German”, “Hungarian”, “Jew”, “Bulgarian” etc) and the “other” regional (“Oltenian”, “Moldavian”, “Bessarabian”), the appreciations being, surprisingly, more positive in the first case. Another differentiation is also distinguished between the generic “other” (defined in global, mediated terms) and the individual “other” (defined in specific, not mediated terms). These findings led us toward the two subsequent shadings which would be proper to apply to this referential criterion.

The less fortunate retrospective perception is achieved, predictably, around “traumatic events” and is partially compensated by the positive influence in the global portrait of valuing “work”. It is interesting to note the observation according to which all the political referentials (“authority”, “political categories”, “political discriminations”) are perceived negatively, suggesting that the whole traumatic existential line is associated with a political element appreciated as disturbing and discriminating, generating strong rejection. A last remark that should be made is that the general field of “culture”, although less influent, produces a positive global tonality – the positive referential values being more numerous than the negative ones with all referential criteria. Such a remark suggests that the private space, the space of celebrations and school space, which give substance to this field, are looked upon as a kind of “refuge” space from the aggressions of history, with its public register, impersonal and institutionalised.

All previous findings strengthen the initial suppositions, according to which the historical and social dynamic significantly affects the discursive contextualization (therefore the corresponding articulation of referential criteria) of life stories. Value portraits associated with referential criteria by examining the most relevant identity profiles which later superposed and considered in their depth, will permit to catch the global self-image of the population investigated. However, there is often a “diurnal other”, serene, and a “nocturnal” one, threatening, but these two categories do not superpose. The boundary that separates them is not an ethnic one, as we supposed, but rather a regional one, as well as one imposed by the image level structuring (generic / particular). One of the most solid referential criteria – through the number of evocations and valuations – remains the “family”, with a preponderant positive tonality. It is significant that the area dominated by positive values is the area of instrumental values ( $\nu_i = 1-20$ ). The area in which the negative values are more present is that of finality values ( $\nu_i = 21-40$ ). The message transmitted by the lines of this portrait seems to suggest that the family constitutes a knot of the social identity representation. The relative level II values reconfirm the importance conferred to *faber* values, but they regroup the self-fulfilling in another register. If *Ae* was on the second position as influence at level II, the structure of level II value categories undergo modifications, only slightly positive, giving way to relation values. Anyhow, all previous findings flagrantly contradict the ethnic stereotype of the “Romanian passiveness”, bringing into forefront the responsible commitment and work values.

It is also interesting to note the comparison carried out among the finality values, which once acquired introduce the social actor in the register of “to have” and the instrumental values in the register of “to be”. We observe that the continuous presence of work and of assuming one’s destiny – represented by the territory of “to be” – is more extensive than the territory which places the subject in the register of “to have”, stressing an important reconstruction of the existential paradigm for those confronted with a threatening and unsettled history. Quite often in the retrospective discourse, the memory becomes a support for the rehabilitation of the identity type, and the recovery takes place rather symbolically and, in any case, in another dimension (Goffman, 1969/2009). Several subjects affirmed in an unburdening refrain, even if “we have lost everything” – goods, houses, lands, a life’s acquisition, “our children achieved themselves”, becoming over years doctors, engineers, professors. Thus, the dispossession in the register of “to be”, suggests a change of the orientation frame of the identity nucleus, which is now valued through another attitude and value opening.

#### 4. Conclusions

The analysis of the relative level I values presents us an overwhelming prevalence of the instrumental values, stressing the previous finding according to which the pressures of history do not determine only a weak retort of its subjects but also an engaging and responsible one, which rather hypostatizes the struggle with history and destiny, than their passive and inert acceptance. Thus, the vocation of communities to mobilize real identity strategies when confronting with an unfavourable social context is reconfirmed (Elias, 199; Camilleri & Vinsonneau, 1996), precisely to confer coherence to its own existential line and to master the contextual determinations, activating communitarian resilience (Werner, 1995).

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