IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION-IDENTITY SYMBOLS

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Abstract: The human being as individuality, as well as human communities have created a number of symbols aimed at highlighting social status and social group belonging. Prehistory records tattoos and skin painted drawings used as magical signs to protect the individual from evil spirits (of animals, especially) and to underline military or religious leadership status. During Antiquity, with state establishment, new sets of symbols emerge: state symbols (the state's flag or/and the state's armed forces' flag), emblems of imperial families, signs of hierarchies in religious and laic society. This is also the time when state symbols are imprinted on coins. As a result of crusades and tournaments the most varied sets of symbols appear and evolve during the Middle Ages. These belong to noble families, kingdoms, Church representatives, papacy. The Middle Ages is also the time when money flow is on the increase. With the attempts to shape nations within the boundaries in which they evolved, the modern age has facilitated the eIdentitatea mergence of the national identity. Hence identity symbols develop and indicate new historical changes.
Border realignment along time and identity have been the features of ethnic groups. Moreover, traditional outfit, traditional art, language and religion are defining characteristics for these. The coexistence of ethnic groups with the majority has been a well defined reality across Europe, and Transylvania is but one such example. The multiethnic identity from within the Inner Carpathians has contributed to the emergence of numerous identity symbols supporting the establishment of a national consciousness and has also been an example of multicultural education and transfer of these symbols.

Keywords: tattoo, flag, coin,language, traditional outfit.

Defining identity

Identity as a theoretical concept can be approached from the perspective of several disciplines: history, sociology and anthropology. Consequently, it acquires a number of dimensions like: "the ability to be oneself, not to change and thus be different from the others, perfect similitude, complete match, as well as a person's identity data" [1]. The legal boundaries of the term were establihed during the 1978 UNESCO conference. In general, identities mold based on ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious features. Nowadays, to be part of a minority is a matter of a person's free will in almost all countries worldwide. The concept of minority was first defined by the United Nations and its defining dimensions are:

Pluralism-different identities living within the same geographic boundaries while preserving their defining features.

Assimilation-using violence or other means to constrain minorities.

Segregation- minority groops are isolated and separated from the majority.

It is each state's obligation to protect and acknowledge group diversity. "Identity building is based on perceptions and categories that determine a plethora of simultaneous or successive affiliations" [2]. An individual's identity and values are defined by the former's belonging to a social group. Collective identities can be classified into three categories:

-natural belonging (identifiable by gender, skin colour)

-innate belonging (rendered by the ethnic group, religion, nationality) that can be changed if efforts are made.

-inherited belonging (as a result of eduaction, training, organization membership).

The features of a person's identity can only be defined by compariosn with the characteristics of another person and in terms of perceptual boundaries and otherness. In this respect, "identity building is part of tense relationship between continuity (faithfulness to customs, traditions, collective memory and its handover) disruption (cause by doubts, crises)"[3].

Evolution of identity symbols in time

Since ancient times people have been on a search for means and symbols to express identity in their relationships with their counetrparts. The oldest such symbols are body drawings (and the colors used for these) that date back to pre historic times, feathers worn on body or head, necklaces of animal fangs and others. These were markers of an individual's position in a given group called tribe or stemma or means to worship spirits and for magical purposes. Symbols most often took the shape of the animals living in the area and were also used by those who were in charge of religious and magic rituals (by magi, wizards and doctors at the same time). The symbols were used to identify and tell a tribe from another. These first forms of symbols alongside a dialect were characteristics of narrow human communities and they were known and referred to as identity markers by the neighbouring communities.

The next stage in the evolution of identity symbols is triggered by the establishment of states, the layering of social classes and the emergence of authority and its use by a small number of people over a majority. In ancient states, the power symbols became the main means to emphasize political identity. Oriental monarchies (the Kingdom of Babylon, the ancient Egypt, Persia) were keen on creating new identity symbols related to power and authority display and strengthening in front of subjects: the flag of the state that was also the flag of the armed forces, the sceptre carried by the monarch as a sign of power (alongside other markers of power such as the presence of wild animals), specific garment, golden jewellery.

In the early Middle Ages Cristianity spreads and was acknowledged as religion all over Europe and in the East and hence identity symbols evolved. Institutions like that of the Christian church in Europe, the Pope's (the 5th-6th centuries), the hierachies characteristic of monasteries and bishopries led to the emergence of numerous identity symbols for the Christians: the cross, the ecclesiastic garment, Pope's flag and even the coin issued by the latter. These were all symbols that were to last until nowadays and to mark identity. Alongside the ecclesiastic authorities, the secular ones (the king and the royal family, the high ranking servants, the officers) would also have their own identity symbols (crown, a knight's sword, garment) by which to differentiate from one another and yet display the authority of the state they represented. Once the crusades were over, the knights who no longer had to fight organized Medieval tournaments for which a lot of identity symbols are created: flags, feathered helmets, shields-all of which displayed personal identity sign and to be known by the name of heraldic symbols. Their emergence actually gave rise to a new stage in the evolution of identity symbols. Modern age is characterized by the progress triggered by economic and commercial development and this is directly reflected at the level of social evolution. The reestablishment of the broders within Europe and the existence of multinational empires led in the early 19th century to the development of national ideals and to

the emergence of media and national movements. These, in their turn, also led to the appearance of new identity symbols. From a political point of view, nationalities aimed at building national states within natural boudaries and the disbanding of the empires. That was achieved through warfares that ultimately led to World War I. The ethnics were to be called minorities and they started fighting for their rights and freedoms. As a result, state identity appeared and was represented through various symbols: flags and not only. Ethnics preserved their identity in different ways: preserving their language (as different from that of minorities), religion (which could also be different from the minorities'), culture (displayed through customs, traditional crafts and outfit). After World War II the rights of minorities were formally acknowledged through the United Nations Charter and included in the founding laws of every state.

Even communist regimes that came to power in East Europe after 1945 tried to anchor their political discourse into identity symbols: the hammer and the sickle red flag, the military uniform displaying symbols of the socialist state, the worshiping of the leader's personality, national flags of the socialist states (the one of the Socialist Republic of Romania included symbols pointing out to the richness of the Romanian land and soil and leaving out any symbols that might have reminded the past identity of the state). People's garment is an important part of identity symbols and for centuries it differentiated through visual means among various social classes: the clergymen, the aristocrats, the nobles. Nowadays, garment is rather a matter of a person's identity. There were also clothing codes for specific trades and events or ceremonies. Fashion trends come into play with the feminist movement in the 18th century and even nowadays have an important say in underpinning identity and in shaping non verbal communication given people's focus on adopting them as they appear.

For the past years, identity symbols have increased in numbers and are to be read at various levels. Currently there are symbols characterizing economic and political structures like the European Union (flag, anthem, language-English), military structures (like NATO), adminstrative structures (counties, town halls), national states defined by geographic boundaries, cultural associations, religious establishments. Symbol emergence is boosting as a result of computers and media influence but that leads to a decrease in their content. Identity symbols pervade commercials. However, even though this multitude of symbols is a natural part of humankind's historic evolution and of economic competition, there is the risk for identity features to fade away, become distorted and even disappear. Globalization and the establishment of the European Union are a danger to indentity symbols. Hence, the rhetorical question: are these trends just the result of adaptation or a sign of identity symbols' dissolution? Another phenomenon of the 21st century is that of finding personal identity within a plethora of offers. It is definitely a challenge and obligation for every individual to preserve identity. The means to accomplish this are anchored into each person's consciousness. Identity is a continuously evolving process. Most likely, this is the reason underpinning all the discussions and papers on this topic.

Identity building in Transylvania

The geographic space from within the Carpathians, that is Transylvania, is an example of identity landmarks and a possible model in building these. The history of the province records events that were greatly shaped by the features of given time. Ever since the 10th

century this area drew the attention of the young Hungarian state. A century later, it is conquered by the neighboring state and, in the effort to consolidate the royal strongholds in the region, two peoples were brought into the area at different historic times: the Szekely in the 11th century and the German colonists (known by the name of Saxons in Transylvania) between the 12th and 13th centuries. The two waves of colonists settled on the territory already inhabited by the Romanians and benefted from numerous privileges granted by the kings of Hungary, while the Romanian people of this area did not receive any advantages from the royal court. The two groups of colonists were free to decide by themselves how to administer their territory and to choose their own representatives in the management fora of the region and later of the Transylvanian province. Between the 14th and the 18 centuries, the two communities will create their own identity symbols under the influence of some sort of rivalry among them. The language used by the Szekely and Saxons in Transylvania was an important landmark along with the religious unity (until 1540 they were Catholic and after the Saxons accepted Lutheranism, and the Szekely the Unitarianism). The Saxons and the Szekely will create adminisitrative symbols, flags to represent their ownership of the territory, anthems, and specific guild signs.

The representation of the other, which is an important part of identity, was as an enemy. As a result, a lot of ethnic stereotypes were created and maintained in Transylvania. "The Romanians were identified with the shepherds, sheep breeders, a cliché that included a lot of connotations, one of which referred to their cyclical mobility because of the herds and that was fifferent from the stability of the Hungarians who developed a Western feudal town civilization" [4]. However, the Hungarians from Hungary when travelling in Transylvania admired the Romanians' traditional outfit and folklore. The Saxons perceived the Romanians as lazy, quitters and unable to create urban structures. The Romanians from Transylvania perceived the Saxons and Hungarians as enemies who had come to their territory and taken away their rights. For Romanians "the collective defense reflex triggered by these fear and continuous defiance favors the development of an original self representation that tends to create compensatory myths, imaginary spaces meant to symbolically protect the threatened identity and the offended national pride"[5].

Starting with the 18th century, the Habsburg dynasty representatives reorganize the empire, and Transylvania as well, from an adminstrative point of view. Hence, the autonomous areas disappear and a new stage emerges in the history of the relations among the ethnic people. Under the influence of Scoala Ardeleana the national consciousness of the Romanians from Ardeal is shaped (through arguments built around the idea of the Lain origin of the Romanian people) and the attitude of the Hungarian and Saxon historians towards Romanians change in a positive realistic manner.

Transylvania, as the focus of this paper, is a model of identity structures that evolved in time. As well as of multicultural education and ethnic tolerance.

Conclusions

Identity and the elements contributing to its shaping give rise to a plethora of variables worth investigating. This article aimed at approaching only some of these in full awareness that a comprehensive outlook requires much more in terms of the complexity of the endevor. The evolution of identity symbols took place at the same time with political and historic

changes. Hence, it is all too natural to have a sharp difference between the identity symbols of Antiquity, for example, and the identity symbols of today. Human communities and the individual needed identity symbols to leave a trace of their presence and to make the difference between them and the others. A comparison between today's situation and the end of the last century makes it obvious that globalization and the creation of the European Union have led to a decreased role of identity. It is therefore the responssibility of communities to find new ways to define identity and to preserve their history. I strongly believe that identity elements represent values that define a community and make it survive in front of its counterparts and in its inheritors' mentality. Transylvania has the potential to do that: all it takes is the ability to find it and bring it to the surface.

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