

Recognition of Cultural Identity in Banat (1867-1918)

Banat'ta Kültürel Kimliğin Tanınması (1867-1918)

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Abstract

This paper investigates a time of high cultural intensity, namely, the modernizing of Romanian culture, and maybe even the first stage towards Western alignment. The complexity of the issues in question may also reside in the fact that the specific area of interest of this paper focuses on the Banat region and it “encounters” all the aspects caused by the need of Banat in those years to build a Romanian identity, amid a multi-ethnic space. It is a way in which the culture sheds the light on the linguistic aspects, while the linguistic investigation makes the cultural context relevant. The cultural and historical perspective involves the linguistic one, emphasizing the inter-disciplinary aspect of the exegesis. In the present research we are considering the following aspect: the spreading of culture through schools as a trigger of identity consciousness. Acknowledging Romanian language in elementary schools became an active means of recognizing cultural identity.

Keywords: Romanian spirituality, Banat, cultural identity, school.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Romanya kültürünün modernizasyonu ve belki de Batıya yaklaşmasında ilk aşama olarak nitelendirilebilecek, yüksek kültürel yoğunluğa sahip bir dönemi incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın Banat bölgesine odaklanması ve bu çok-etnikli coğrafyada o dönemde bir Rumen kimliği inşa edilmesi için Banat'a duyulan ihtiyacın farklı boyutlarının ele alınması çalışmayı daha da kompleks bir hale getirmiştir. Banat bölgesi, Romanya milli kimliğine bir örnektir: Burası, “Avrupanın Kapısı” olarak görülmüştür, Habsburg ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun sınırında bulunan stratejik askeri ve ekonomik bir merkezdir. 1776-1867 yılları arasında Habsburg İmparatorluğu'nun, 1867-1918 yılları arasında ise Avusturya-Macaristan İmparatorluğu'nun bir parçası olmuştur. Avusturya-Macaristan İmparatorluğu tarafından bırakılan bu arazi, Avrupa uygarlığının ve kültürel modellerinin asimilasyonunu sonucunda yapay bir kültürel alan olmuştur. Banat'ın kültürel özelliği, Rumenlerin etnik kökenin, atalarının topraklarında yaşadıkları tarihi olayların getirdiği niteliklerin, köy yaşamının erdemlerine atfedilen değer, gelenekler ve folkloraya dayanan etnografik kültürün bir birleşimidir. Kültürel kimlik, bir kültürün Avrupa kültürleri arasında nasıl hayatta kaldığının sentezini ve bu varoluş şeklinin özbilincini temsil eder. Bu, sürekli bir kuramsal yeniden yapılandırma ve Banat bölgesindeki durum tarihi oluşumları üzerinden incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada kimlik bilincinin bir tetikleyicisi olarak eğitim-öğretim yoluyla kültürün yayılması ele alınmaktadır. İlköğretim okullarında Romanya dilinin kabul edilmesi kültürel kimliği tanımadada aktif bir araç haline gelmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Romanya kimliği, Banat bölgesi, kültürel kimlik, okul eğitimi.

A Hypostasis of Romanian Spirituality: The Banat Area

The Banat area is the topos of study. The research is meant to be a thorough study of old material, that, by our research results, offers a revealing dimension of data about a fecund period of Romanian spirituality. The sociocultural and ideological coordinates of the time are investigated or discovered in relation with the path opened by the European Enlightenment. This coherent spiritual pattern, from the point of view of the values in study, sets in the South—East of Europe in different rhythms and shapes, because of the instability of the social and political contexts of the countries in the area. The dynamic moment of the spiritual resurrection starts from Transylvania and Banat, because the new spirit of the European Enlightenment enters the Romanian territory through those regions, and spreads towards the other Romanian Principalities.

We emphasize on the connectivity, based on the spiritual national flux, and point out the characteristics of the ideology, in its manifest forms in the territory of Banat, through the press preoccupied with pedagogical issues¹. The choice of the written press is explicitly motivated by the social-cultural functionality of the press, and by the specific of such mass media, in general, and also, within the given historical frame, by the persuasive power of the press, and by the role it played in the complex process of shaping the Romanians' identity, consciously assumed, as well as their feeling of belonging to the wider European identity (Banaduc 2017 15).

The exegesis is included in the present science tendency that surpasses the purely synchronic vision due to the diachronic investigation dimension. In order to stress the diachronic aspects, we have used the comparative-historical method, the descriptive and the contextual analysis method. The factual information gathering is done by the method of excerpting text from the press of the studied epoch. For the good understanding and interpretation of the socio-cultural aspects at the basis of texts, we have used a bibliography consistent with the specialised scientific literature.

Our endeavour is based on the idea of valorising culture from a pedagogic point of view, starting from the fact that preserving the national element helps keep the Romanian identity, and the Romanian language plays a major part in the process. To be more exact, we try to highlight how acknowledging Romanian language in elementary schools became an active means of recognizing cultural identity.

¹ The Romanian press of Banat, preoccupied with pedagogical issues, can be considered a transition stage towards the modern pedagogical press. The articles and other materials submitted by the teachers are sometimes published in almanacs, teaching reunion annals or in the press of Transylvania and of the Principalities, those texts that were considered of higher interest. When the first periodicals with mosaic content appear in Banat, with a didactic-cultural target, the people of the school aim for these journals. In 1886 some pedagogic magazines are issued, but they are ephemeral. No pedagogical magazine is issued between the year 1888 and 1909, on the territory of Banat. In the twentieth century, in 1909, the first modern pedagogic magazine in Banat is called "the Educator". The lack of coherence in the evolution of this publishing phenomenon was determined by the juridical regime of the press, imposed by the authorities, and also by the polemics among educators, caused by confessional belonging, politics, social status, but also by the fact that the target readers could not support financially a constant printing of such periodicals.

Its historical evolution made Banat into a unique Romanian area, rather colourful compared to others because of the first populations of colonists brought by the Empires. This mingling of languages and populations brought together various European patterns of culture and civilization.

Both nineteenth and twenty-century Banat was governed by the need to state a strong Romanian identity, in a multi-ethnic space. The high level of cultural preoccupation of the inhabiting population made it easier for an objective awareness of the diversity to appear in this area, at a social level. The written papers of the time mirror a state of spiritual tolerance, as well as a common mental background, aiming towards similar goals (Banaduc 2019 434). A fragment from “Luminătorul”:

The identity of interest to protect their nationality should guide both the Saxons, the Serbs and the Slovaks, as well as the cosmopolitan Germans of Hungary to proceed together [...] and the Romanian nation shall gladly receive any assistance to earn the rights of the nationalities, which, once gained, shall not only serve the benefit of the Romanian people, but of all these sister nations, who are in our misfortunate homeland. (1881)

Within the area of Banat, the philosophy of Lights bares the print of the German Enlightenment reform, because it had been imposed as an official doctrine. Vienna is the centre which shines culture upon this province. The Austrian Enlightenment is based on culture, since it was also a way to establish and empower their multinational monarchy. In this respect, clear “culturalizing” lines are drawn in Banat: institutionalizing culture, making Science popular, nurturing language and organizing an educational system in the mother tongue, through schools. In order to have enlightened citizens, the Romanian youth has access to study in the Empire’s University centres. It is the age when the Romanians discover the European spirituality. Hence, Banat appears to be animated by a spirit of emulation, within a society highly aware of the European ideals of the time.

From a diachronic perspective, the regional particularities are also explained through the social-historical context proper. Between 1860 and 1918, Austrian-Hungarian dualism was established in Banat. The willingness to politically reaffirm the nationalities of the Habsburg Empire² becomes clear around the year 1860. Implicitly, the Romanians, too, hope to have Banat acknowledged as a national-cultural entity³. Even though Banat is not successfully recognized as an

² Starting with the eighteenth century, following the war between the Russians and the Turks, which ended with the Peace of Passarovitz, Banat was occupied by the Habsburg Empire.

³ On October 20th 1860, the absolutist system of government is abandoned, and the constitutional system is introduced. This form of government allowed the political affirmation of the nationalities, it guaranteed religious freedom etc. The Imperial Court of Vienna acknowledged the autonomy of Transylvania. The Law became was passed on February 26th 1861. Following these decisions, people of culture and scholars, such: Andrei Şaguna, Ioan Popasu, Andrei Mocioni, Petru Mocioni, Vicenţiu Babeş ş.a., require from the Court to incorporate Banat into the autonomous Transylvania. The Emperor rejects the request from the Romanians, and on 27th December 1860 decides to join Banat to Hungary. On 20th September 1865, the Imperial Patent of February 1861, which assured the autonomy of the countries within the Empire is cancelled, hence, Transylvania is no longer autonomous. On 6th December 1865, the “Diet” (Parliament) issues a decree to join Transylvania to Hungary, hence starting the way of the Austrian-Hungarian dualism. Starting from

Autonomous Province, the people of Banat embark on a process of preserving their cultural identity, aiming at a cultural unity among all Romanians, to set the basis of political unity. During this troubled period in the lives of the Banat people, who were forced to face the consequences of legal restraints, the national idea of illumination and self-expression through culture, reasserted its importance, and the political significations of all cultural activities become deeper. Linguist Niculescu's theory (1978 99-115), about the existence of the cultural inter-regional circuit of the Romanian language and culture, is the foundation of this approach.

In the case of Romanians, in spite of the fact that society was structured differently, from one area to another, the standards are owed to the "Romanian-ness" of origin; there is a national spiritual flow, and an identity of religion. Gheorghe Platon (17) proves that, despite political borders, there was a shift of the centre of Romanian spiritual activity, alternatively, from one side of the Carpathians, to the other, by means of an active intellectual process, which announced the path for the national idea, to the strongly affirmed identity consciousness. In the newspapers of the time, there is an explicit confession of the effort towards political and cultural emancipation:

The previous century was the century of the awakening for the great-grandsons of Trajan, and the year of 1848, the gate through which us too, the Romanians, entered and joined the line of civilized people. Muntenia and Moldavia, the two countries under the yoke, have come together into the strong Romania of today; the Romanians of Bucovina have also come back to senses, and nowhere other than into the land of beech trees are the Romanian colours of the flag more proudly worn. We, the Romanians of Banat, Crişana, Maramurăş and Transylvania, have shaken the chains of the double bondage. We are no longer [...] either tributary to the Serbs, and today [...] we became a factor for the powerful ones to consider. We have our autonomous church. We have built our schools out of our own richness, we have cultural settlements of all kinds. (*The Diocesan Leaflet* 1901)

The transformations of those years⁴ bring in contact the Romanian world, the relationships are intensified based on the unity of people, faith, in accordance with the objectives of the epoch. In this respect, we make reference to the writings from the newspapers:

On foreign lands, our sent ones made an old popular saying true: *Blood does not turn into water!* They became drawn together at first sight, as good brothers would, if they met years after having been parted; they would live together, supporting each other with their studies, [...] and warming to the idea of salvation through political Romanian Union. [...] The youth [...] had come back to the country, and started to work:

1867, in the official documents, the name of the region was replaced by South Hungaria, in the name of the idea of a national Hungarian state.

⁴ Major events take place and these change drastically the historical evolution of the Romanians: the Revolution led by Tudor Vladimirescu, the Revolution of 1848, the Union, in 1859, of Moldavia and Tara Romanesca, the Independence of the Kingdom of Romania, 1877 and the Proclamation of Romania as a Monarchy (Royal Kingdom) in 1881.

Alecsandri would put together [...] theatre plays, Mihail Kogălniceanu would hold public speaking sessions on national history, also starting a literary sheet, Asachi would look after the public schooling; Constantin Negruzzi wrote his stories in Romanian language; [...] Eliade commanded his generation, by words and by own example, to work; alike, in Transylvania and Banat men⁵ were already working, earning for progress and driven by love for those left behind on the path of culture, in a word, one could observe everywhere a movement promising of new life. (*The Diocesan Leaflet* 1894, 4)

The identity discourse present in the written papers of the time illustrates what Herder (1973) called cultural nationalism. The cultural nationalism can be seen as a progressive history of humanity, governed by the national idea, and described by the creative personality of a group which evolves in time, a result of the efforts of countless number of generations. The quotation inserted above shows that cultural rebirth makes possible the acknowledgement of identity. Both the direct and indirect contacts of scholars with the sciences, arts, philology and literature of other peoples open the path of fruitful cultural dialogue.

Niculescu states that “around the 1840s and 1850s, the Romanian language and culture, of all areas of Romanian culture, were in close contact with all Romance areas of Occidental Europe” (2003 155). Therefore, even though at a different pace, culture begins to modernize within all three Romanian provinces. The culture of those times is revigorated not by substitution of episteme, but through a complex modernizing process. *Westernizing* is “a thrilling ferment, an incentive, a rigorous confrontation term for the whole of our spiritual possibilities” (Marino 2004 28-29).

Aspects of the Recognition of Cultural Identity

The cultural identity represents the synthesis of the way in which a culture survived among European cultures and the self-consciousness of this way of existence. From this perspective, such identity gives coherence to the discourses that legitimate the self-consciousness of our culture, namely of an age of it. The assembly of cultural identity articulations is really deep, especially in the case of levelling the identity discourse in the Romanian spaces. The symbol of the social homogeneity of the Romanian people is its national idea. Owing to this creed, the intensity of identity discourse increases and it largely contributes to the awakening of cultural and political will of all the Romanians, including to the development of a climate of spiritual effervescence, which is a proper frame for the cultural activism to manifest (a manner of intellectual pursuance of the ideal of national unity and universal integration through culture).

In the area of Banat, the recognition of cultural identity means the furthering of the Enlightenment programme. What sets in is a stage of preserving the national element as a means to preserve Romanian national identity through nurturing the

⁵ Healthy communication among the social classes is also part of the uniqueness of Banat. There are often mentions that the groups from Banat make “the most civilized part of the Romanians, where the peasants have the highest understanding, lands, and are at the highest cultural level [...] and all the avant-garde battles of the idea of nation are held” (Goga 1935).

language. Hence, the language, as an expression of historical continuity, is defined in this “century of the nationalities [...] not necessarily as a means of communication, but, most frequently, as a means of spiritual unifying, an element of constituency and preservation of nationality” (David 13-14). In the written press, the part of the language as the most convincing and the clearest evidence of the ethnic unity of all the Romanians is shaped:

It is the ideal domain I indirectly inherited from my forerunners and the teacher that directly passed it onto me is called and is my mother. It is the norm and the conscientious manifest of my soul. It is where the most eclectic master of my character as a gens and the strongest guardian of my individuality become manifest. (*Controla* 1901)

An element which completes the colouring of the phenomenon in study appears within the relation between Romanity (Roman, Latin roots) and identity, because these concepts make, at a level of ideas “a dialectic, organic unity,” finding themselves in an “interdependence relationship,” according to Victor V. Grecu. The author states that the Romanity (as in Romance languages) is the “landmark” of identity, since it shades light upon the identity traits:

The concept of Romanity comprised the main ideas which represent axiomatic truths: the Roman ancestry of the Romanian people; the continuity, the permanence of the Roman element in Dacia; the unity, the kinship of Romanians in all the territories they inhabited, the Latin aspect of the Romanian language, the Roman essence of certain traditions and folklore habits, which shaped the concept of identity. (14)

In the manner of the epoch, “the national politicization of the idea of Romanity” becomes the ideological basis of the entire Romanian national programme, as Doina David (13) observes. Clear directions are set to crystallize the modern culture based on a plan to refine and renew the Romanian language, to be more exact: to purify it and to make it homogenous from an etymology point of view, to unify the norms, to set the orthographic system, and to settle the problem of the neologisms. The attention given to these aspects, in the political circumstances of the time, is reasonable and it justifies the orientation towards the Latin character of our language and towards the romance roots. Even though there are exaggerations and slips because of the theoretical consciousness of the time, or due to the involvement of scholars, linguistically less prepared for such a process, of simply owing to the revolutionary inflated spirit as a result of the pressure of the de-nationalization of the Romanians, we cannot deny the joined efforts of all those involved to open a significant perspective towards solving the problems which the Romanian language faced.

We have to underline that, based on valuable research (Gheție 1975; Munteanu, Țâra 1978; David 1980), the contribution of the Romanians from Banat, Transylvania and Bucovina to the appearance of the literary version of the Romanian language has been proven. It is also acknowledged that the Latin pattern, the Latin ideas have played a meaningful part in shaping neology elements and borrowings from Romance languages; the functional styles have also evolved, and with the help of non-Romance media the Latinity of our language has been reinforced.

Acknowledging Romanian Language in Elementary Schools

It is vital and a historical necessity, even, to educate the younger generations in the spirit of Romanian traditions and particularities through schools. School has been acknowledged as the “basis of culture” and has as goal to “form and set the character of society” (*The Diocesan Leaflet* 1886). The Orthodox spirit, through the schooling policy of the Church, is the moral guiding and guardian energy when the politics of the state grow against the idea of a schooling system in the Romanian language. The teacher is a servant of culture; he or she becomes aware of his/her active part in society, knowing that science and culture are symbolic expressions of the nation’s identity, consciousness, unity and ultimately, European-ness. In this respect, the teacher sees the act of nurturing the language as:

a means to serve the other objects; therefore, it shall be reduced to many systemic exercises taken from the living field of the language. Grammar shall no longer be an end, but a means to serve writing and especially, composition. Grammar is the philosophy of the language. The time that the student use to waste on memorizing definitions and analyses, shall be used for writing and composition drills. These drills, apart from setting a connection between the real world and the intellectual one, will introduce the children to the living world of the language [...]. Reading is an art placed in service for all other sciences. (*The Educator* 1911)

Spreading culture through the medium of language, in a patriotic sense is transforming language into a modern instrument, from the point of view of its possibilities of expression. One must also keep in mind the ability to answer, from a linguistic point of view, the needs of a culture in progress; its laws are based on its specificity (respecting its spirit).

Cultivating language: “grammar is the philosophy of language” (*The Educator* 1911). Cultivating language meant knowing the words existing in the language, their meanings and the ways of combining them in the construction of communication. The teaching of language aimed at adopting civilised expressions, and it underlined the formative role of language, as far as the spirit of discipline and respect towards social norms is concerned.

Reading: “reading, at the core of teaching native language, is a source of the culture specific to the nation” (*The Diocesan Leaflet* 1898). Although in the past the aim of reading was that of assimilating linguistic and textual patterns, validated for morphologic and syntactic accuracy, starting with the 19th century the formative role of reading was adjusted. Thus, reading became a “cultural gesture” used in order to shape the pupil’s identity profile. This end was achievable based on the study of the Romanian literature history and took shape in the reading books. Through their texts, the reading books emphasised a programme of cultivating the young generation by “throwing in the seeds of Romanian-ness and nationality”: “The reading books must take into account the ethnic origin of a people. [...] they must represent our cultural state, our way of thinking, all our ambitions and aspirations as a people” (*The Educator* 1910). The education plans approved “in the meeting of the Romanian orthodox metropolitan consistory” reflected this opening. Here is a testimony in this sense:

5th year. Reading will be used in order to make Romanian literature known, by reading the old authors: Pan, Barac, Văcărescu, the chroniclers [...] selected biographies, historical narratives, stories about customs will be read [...], 6th year. The reading will be continued based on the reading book by studying fragments from newer authors: Mureșanu, Bolintineanu, Alecsandri, Eminescu, Coșbuc. (*The Educator* 1909)

When it comes to cultivating language and reading literary heritage books, the text was viewed as a bridge between literature and linguistics. The stages of understanding the literary text: qualitative linguistic deciphering of the text. This aspect presupposed clarifications of a lexical nature on the part of the educator, preceded or followed by the expressive reading of a literary text in order to teach pupils the phonetics of language. Successive readings of the text offered pupils the necessary breaks in order to reflect on it and emphasise its message, values and moral significations.

Didactic methodology is centred on activity: “The child feels joy by producing something new and by working independently. S/he discovers his/her whole spiritual world” (*The Educator* 1911). From this perspective, “active” is the pupil who “makes efforts of inner, personal reflection, who undertakes a mental activity of looking for, researching and rediscovering truths, knowledge” (Cherghit 73). The didactic means used by educators in order to have pupils learn the signs of language flexibility were: the variety of literary texts suggested for study and the exercises which aimed to refine expression by discovering the stylistic resources of the language. The role of exercises was to make pupils perceive the many linguistic registers which one could employ in communication, to understand that “the beauty of language means richness and variety, shadows of meaning and flexibility of language, it means the use of the stylistic resources of the language, the use of the right word in the right place” (Avram 85).

We can notice the rhetorical-stylistic direction of approaching grammar. The spreading of culture through language lies under the heading of rhetoric. Style qualities, clarity, precision, accuracy, harmony, must be the fundamental qualities of literary expression. In his article, “Style exercises and compositions in popular school,” educator Gheorghe Catană started from the idea that “we must try and do our best so that everything that the pupil may learn can make him/her be able to express himself/herself in writing too, for this is the most significant purpose of teaching the language” (*The Educator* 1910). The author approached writing as an essential intellectual activity which could ensure pupils’ access to the forms of the most important culture. The fundamental skills of written expression could be taught through a series of exercises: transforming dialogue into narration, summarising a piece of reading, developing a fundamental idea in detail and the main ideas given, description or optional text production, comparing texts, studying the didactic poem, the targeted categories being summary, argumentation, description, explanatory text, commentary. Pupil’s active involvement in using language in order to develop his/her creativity and the education of a “lively” relation with the literary text, are a few directions which were passed on as a methodology to the future generations as well. We can notice the modernity of the methodological points of views, some of them becoming principles of the national modern elementary education.

Conclusion

The reflexive attitude of scholars and teachers from Banat fits into a society pattern, partly imposed to them by their history, partly achieved through commitment towards tradition. Consequently, a cultural pattern is built in Banat, one that is composed by adjustment and mitigation, a reflex of discourses, with spiritual, social and historic relevance, for times governed by a strong civic spirit. The depth of these discourses acts as a ferment for cultural activism aimed at recognition of cultural identity, both on the part of teachers, and on the part of the most refined scholars. We may call this a social praxis, of form and shape typical of Banat, even though, it is a phenomenon present in all the Romanian provinces through the nineteenth century.

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