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***SITUATIONS REGARDING THE ALTERATION OF THE
INTERETHNIC COMMUNICATION IN THE 17TH CENTURY IN THE
ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES***

Abstract: Interethnic communication is an essential objective of the contemporary world and cultural dialogue is its main component. Ignoring and not respecting the cultural codes, neglecting religious beliefs are some conditions that affect interethnic relations. These situations were valid for the Romanian society in the 17th century. Our study aims at highlighting these situations based on the notes of foreign travellers. Many of them have generated animosity between states, and others have influenced perception and judging Others. They were very close to becoming the cause conflicts, isolation and tension between states. Our observations demonstrate that these situations do not differ radically from current realities.

Keywords: ceremony, communication, cultural codes, cultural dialogue, foreign travellers, the Romanian Principalities

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The (self)images, formed in time and transmitted from one generation to another through tradition and education have proven important when establishing any dialogue between different ethnic identities. Entering this “space” of representations, the communication with the Other reflected in fact the manner in which a collectivity regarded the different ones. That is why the word and the gesture addressed to the Other constantly depended on prejudices and perception and judgmental stereotypes, on momentary impressions and emotions, on the pressure of events and on the cultural changes of the time.

Beyond the cognitive role, all these played a self-protection role as well, since they acted both as a means of simplifying the inter-human relations, and as a factor of strengthening the social cohesion. From this point of view, we claim that ethnicity is related to the social tendency of including the Other in certain patterns;

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the latter are constructed with the contribution of the perception and evaluation clichés, the more or less imagined images, (self)formed or taken from others.

Starting from these aspects, our endeavour analyses the notes of the foreign travellers¹ taken in the 17th century that we consider literary rather than historical sources due to their style and the intentions lying at the basis of their writing. Therefore, this kind of literature² must be taken with reticence³, due to their subjective and fragmentary⁴ vision. Beginning with the 18th century, these texts, considered by historians as “rather naive or closer to certain writings of bookish nature” on the grounds that they were generally written by “less informed people”, have become more specialised, being written from that moment on by “servants of science”⁵. They proved equally important because their authors, getting directly in touch with the Romanian society, opened new perspectives in the understanding the life of the Romanians⁶. We will also include within these perspectives the problems related to the establishing or blocking the interethnic “dialogue”.

¹ By this phrase we designate all persons who passed through or lived for a while in the Romanian space, for random or purposeful reasons, out of personal or “job-related” interest.

² Consisting of memoirs, diaries, reports or correspondence, referring to less known situations, the foreign travellers’ notes about Romanians were compiled in Nicolae Iorga’s remarkable work, *Istoria românilor prin călători* (*The history of Romanians through travellers*), A. Anghelescu (Editor), Bucharest, 1981, pp. 203-370, as well as in Hurmuzaki’s very well-known collection of documents. Worth mentioning here are the efforts of Sadi-Ionescu, P. P. Panaitescu, Paul Cernovodeanu, etc. We have used the notorious volumes of *Călătorilor străini prin Țările Române* (*Foreign travellers through the Romanian Principalities*) (coord. Maria Holban), a synthesis exploiting the results of the above-mentioned research which will be henceforth quoted as *Călători* (*Travellers*).

³ See Ovidiu Cristea, *Relația de călătorie ca izvor istoric* (*The travelling relationship as historical source*), in *Societatea românească între modern și exotic văzută de călătorii străini (1800-1847)* (*The Romanian society between modern and exotic seen by foreign travellers (1800-1847)*), Bucharest, 2005, pp. 13-25.

⁴ Paul Cernovodeanu, *Imaginaa celuilalt: tipologia imaginii societății românești în viziunea călătorilor străini (sec. XVIII-prima jumătate a sec. XIX)* (*The image of the other: the typology of the Romanian society’s image in the vision of foreign travellers (the 18th century – the first half of the 19th century)*), in *Orașul românesc și lumea rurală. Realități locale și percepții europene la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea și începutul celui de al XIX-lea* (*The Romanian city and the rural world. Local realities and European perceptions at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century*), Brăila, 2004, pp.7-40. The same author signs another work that is useful to our approach: *Societatea feudală românească văzută de călători străini (secolele XV-XVIII)* (*The Romanian feudal society seen by foreign travellers (15th – 18th centuries)*) Bucharest, 1973, pp. 96-125.

⁵ Paul Cernovodeanu, *Imaginaa celuilalt...* (“*The image of the other ...*”), p. 10.

⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *Les voyageurs français dans l’Orient européen*, Paris, 1928, p 6; Paul Cernovodeanu, *Societatea feudală românească...* (*The Romanian feudal society...*), pp. 96-125.

Coming from different cultural environments, foreign travellers were often preoccupied with writing down the exceptions, with emphasising the exceptional or the anecdote, to place the Other in an unfavourable light⁷. Quite often, we notice in these stories an ironic tone, slightly mocking sometimes although, other times, we met a sincere regret for the Romanians' inimical fate.

The numerous references of foreign travellers to what they "saw", "heard" or "lived", expressed with or without emotional implications, place their writings in personal impression register, fact which questions their objectivity. Moreover, we notice that their message adapted its manner of expression giving up, as the case may be, the stylistic embellishments and the erudition, probably due to the political instability and lack of trust⁸, the feeling of insecurity⁹ acutely experienced in that century. In order to become more convincing, most messages tried to concentrate cultivated, documented and attractive impressions and observations. That was also the European cultural orientation, detached from the tutelage of humanism but divided between the provocative baroque and the ordered classicism. If we keep on synthesizing the analysis of the "travelling literature" referring to the Romanian environment of the 17th century, we notice that, although underdeveloped, there were plenty of examples of persuasion intentions and techniques. The fact should not surprise us as the preoccupation of *influencing* the other has been a constant of inter-human and interstate relationships of all historical ages; it has only adapted the means to the specificity of each era¹⁰. As a matter of fact, in the century that we are interested in persuasion was guided by *imagination*, *emotion* and *suggestion* which placed it between opinion and conviction, that is between subjectified knowledge (sensorially determined) and the objectified one (determined by reflections). Because it offered "*logical, emotional and cultural arguments* to support the possible undertaking of that particular action"¹¹ but it did not make the influenced

⁷ These were considered means of persuasion in the communication at the public level, cf. Ch. U. Larson, *Persuasiunea. Receptare și responsabilitate (Persuasion. Reception and responsibility)*, Polirom, Iași, 2003, p.15

⁸ For details, see Rosario Villari, (coord.), *Omul baroc (The baroque man)*, translated by Dragoș Cojocaru, Polirom, Iași, 2000. In the "Introduction" Rosario Villari synthetically described the atmosphere of this "era of great tensions" where "traditionalism and the search for the new, conservatism and rebellion, the love for truth and the cult for dissimulation, sensualism and mysticism, superstitions and reason (...) contradiction and confliction" live together, *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

⁹ To develop the idea, see Toader Nicoară, *Sentimentul de insecuritate în societatea românească la începuturile timpurilor moderne (1600-1830) (The feeling of insecurity in the Romanian society at the beginning of modern times (1600-1830))*, Accent Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2006.

¹⁰ For the early ways and evolution of persuasion, see Ch. U. Larson *op. cit.*, p. 24u.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

one to unconsciously perform the action, persuasion did not identify itself with manipulation¹².

For the Romanian world of the 16th – 18th centuries, as is the case with any medieval society dominated by religious convictions and beliefs, the main criterion of social perception and evaluation is the *ethical-religious* one. Thus, the attitude of the others towards the religion of the majority and their behaviour towards the community constituted the main landmarks in shaping the social representations. Because the observations remained at a peripheral level without the intention of understanding the differences in order to accept them, these are considered today pre-modern ways of social cognition and recognition. As a matter of fact, as the historian Al. Zub concluded: “there is no clear awareness of the relation between one ethnocultural community and another”¹³. If we add to this the precariousness of the information about the Other, we can explain why it has come to superficial generalisations, to mental clichés. The latter ones, having positive or negative connotations, have developed standardisations in the inter-human and inter-communitary relations, influencing the auto-images at the same time. To put it in other words, when shaping the representations about the other it is very important what he/she lets us see and what we start to see within ourselves.

In the writings of the age, whether internal or external, the foreigner was generally perceived collectively, his/her features becoming representative for the entire community he/she belongs to. Whenever he was mentioned in the singular, but not in an individualised sense, that particular detail acted as a category which conferred specificity to the social group in which he/she was included, without requiring any verification. This observation holds true for the present day as well even if globalism means also blurring ethnic differences. As a matter of fact, critical perception of any written message remains important, as the resistance to manipulation and the manifestation of a critical thinking are two directions well supported by the educational policy of the European Union. For these reasons, the observations of our study of the realities of the 17th century prove useful for the understanding of the contemporary world, especially the present day Romanian society.

We consider that, in order to stay within the boundaries of these intentions, the analysis of the foreign travellers’ writings allows us to emphasise the situations

¹² For their presentation, see Sorin Preda, *Jurnalismul cultural și de opinie (Cultural and attitude journalism)*, Iași, 2006, pp.132-220.

¹³ Al. Zub, *Despre studiul alterității la români (On the study of alterity in the Romanian people)*, in *Identitate și alteritate în spațiul cultural românesc (Identity and alterity in the Romanian cultural space)*, collection of studies occasioned by the 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Montreal, 1995, Iași, 1996, p. 337.

in which, due to misinterpretations and confusions, communication was affected, generating unpleasant effects for those involved in the message exchange.

The first case in point refers to the diplomatic field, more precisely to the foreign messengers' reception ceremony¹⁴. This is was first and foremost a favourable moment to gain the other's benevolence and sympathy, very necessary for the acceptance of the future arguments; the objects parade, the favours and gifts granting to the delegates, according to the specificity of the areas the messengers were coming from, etc., represented not only the knowledge of other cultures, the will to pleasantly impress the delegates, but also the compliance with the fashion of the time (eastern or western).

According to the "custom", the ceremony meant to welcome, to join and host the messengers, to invite them to royal dinners, to grant them an audience, to exchange gifts, to see the delegation off when they left the country. Obviously, these protocol gestures were full of symbols which were meant to convey power (reputation and authority), to demonstrate willingness and receptivity, credibility and honesty, to create the circumstances of discovering those details that could betray the future intentions of those present, etc. It was precisely this kind of aspects that constituted, especially for the Polish emissaries, means through which they were trying to gain concessions meant to enhance their personal presentability but also to increase Poland's prestige and to limit the Romanian king's authority at the same time.

We found such an example in the *relations* of the Polish diplomats. They intended to apply during their missions a code of gestures, described in the official reports and corroborated by the secretaries' accounts, with no regard for the diplomatic customs of the visited countries. That was why the "protocol shortcomings" manifested by the Romanian kings became for the Polish delegates signs of Romanian kings' unfriendly politics and the description of what they had meant, sensational many times, was explained by the conviction that "the place betrays the man".

In 1636, the king of Moldavia proved malevolent; the "Report" which wrote down the unfolding of the delegation lead by Jerzy Krasinski noted that "the king's enmity" (Vasile Lupu, April 1634 - 13 April 1653 and 8 May 1653 - 16 July 1653) immediately surfaced: he did not personally welcome the emissary, provided with

¹⁴For the royal court ceremony in the Romanian Principalities when receiving foreign emissaries, see the study signed by Radu Păun, *Scenă și simbol: reprezentării ale puterii în Vechiul Regim românesc (Stage and symbol: representations of power in the Old Romanian Regime)*, in *Spectacolul public între tradiție și modernitate. Sărbători, ceremonialuri, pelerinaje și suplicii (The public show between tradition and modernity. Celebrations, ceremonies, pilgrimages and ordeals)*, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 79-122.

“miserable hosts”, sent little and simple food (although the author of the report had previously underlined the simplicity and unpleasant aspect of the houses in Iași, the poverty and the destructions in the country caused by frequent wars and attacks)¹⁵. All protocol gestures wished for by the emissary were obtained only as a result of the pressure exerted upon the king, mainly by refusing to respond to his invitations. This happened when the Polish representatives were invited to the royal feast: J. Krasinski demanded, through emissaries, that “the king should wait for him on the top of the stairs and climb all the way down when he got off the horse”. Obviously, the king refused, motivating that “it is not customary”, saying that he had already gone much beyond the limit of benevolence by seeing him to the host and through the city and that “never before had an emissary been treated like that”. In order to be persuasive, the king “brought witnesses that he had never acted like that before (...) the boyars even confirmed this under oath”. However, as the emissary threatened that “he would not come to him”, he accepted all emissary’s demands, even the one that requested that he be seated at the king’s right¹⁶.

Another situation that could have tensioned the diplomatic relations was noted in 1643, when the Bieganowski, the Polish emissary, went through Moldavia and Walachia. By his attitude, the emissary forced the king (Vasile Lupu) to get down from the throne and when the king “covered his head, he immediately did the same”¹⁷ (gesture that could have been interpreted as proof of not recognising the authority of the state’s ruler).

We would like to mention here the emissary Rafael Leszczyński’s *Account* in 1700 where he expressed (in the same spirit) his discontent regarding the manner the Moldavian king welcomed him. For instance, the Polish emissary noted, it was “only on the second day of Easter that he (the king) sent some meat” for him¹⁸. What he failed to mention was the fact that the Romanian piety was renowned at the time, fasting representing an obligation for any Christian. Moreover, the accentuated poverty of the Romanian Countries, repeatedly mentioned by foreign travellers, could have been an equally serious reason for not feeding up the mass of diplomatic delegates. We would also like to emphasise the fact that, starting with 1700, the ceremonial demands of the Polish emissaries got firmer and firmer, being supported by the argument of “tradition” and strengthened by “evidence” written by the emissaries of the previous missions.

From the Romanian point of view, the Polish diplomatic demands were interpreted as infatuation, as manifestations of an exaggerated ego, prisoner of

¹⁵ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. V, coordinated by M. Holban, Bucharest, 1973, pp. 113-123.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 193.

¹⁸ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. VIII, coordinated by M. Holban, Bucharest, 1983, p. 17.

exterior ways of expression, which imposed a mechanical submission to them. Obviously, the impressive procession would attract the population, curious to witness the show of colours, gestures and opulence. That is why any exaggeration was a serious threat to the royal Romanian prestige, which would tension the publicly unfolded diplomatic meeting. In reality, the Polish society of the 17th century was completely obedient to the imperatives of gestures, each of these conveying a well-known code and mandatory for its members¹⁹.

As far as the welcoming ceremony for the diplomatic delegations is concerned, we notice that the *toponymic* mentions, the “*historical*” *hillocks and crosses* were not accidental; being related to the commemorating intentions of maintaining the collective memories, they had to be displayed to the foreigners one way or another. Considered evidence of the past, reminding the facts, the victories and emotions of those times, they had become strong arguments in influencing the ideas and actions of the others. Thus, in 1636 the Cârniceni village reminded the Krasinski delegation of Jijia, a river “famous and memorable for Potocki’s defeat”, in whose waters he had been stuck and slautered, “with almost his entire army”, by king Ștefan Tomșa of Moldavia. Another mention refers to “Stroici’s *hillock*”, “for eternal memory”, where Stroici and other boyars were executed for having defected to Potocki’s side²⁰. In the 1640 report, these “signs” of history were presented this time with emotional details related to the unjust defeat of the Polish. As a result, Moldavia did not constitute a trustworthy state and everything accounted for in the missions could not be questioned. But mentions were about two hillocks in Walachia also, signs of commemoration of the king’s victories against the enemies²¹, as well as a village (near Teleajen) where the Polish troops had been victorious (although the battle dates were mistaken²²). Consequently, Walachia is a friendly country and all the details of the Polish missions can be only favourable.

Another example that could lead to the alteration of the interethnic dialogue but different in nature from the above mentioned facts was found in the writings of Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, an emissary sent on a diplomatic mission to the Ottoman Porte by the English king William III of Orania. Going through Walachia, he was invited to participate in the feast organized in his honour by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714). He was introduced to the rest of the dinner companions

¹⁹ Maria Bogucka, *Gesture, Ritual and Social Order in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century Poland*, in *A Cultural History of Gesture. From Antiquity to the Present Day*, edited by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, Polity Press, 1991, pp.190-209 (http://keur.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/wetenschappers/11/125/08_c8.pdf).

²⁰ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. V, 1973, p. 114.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

²² *Ibidem*, note 49, p. 119.

as “a servant of the emperor” (Leopold I of the Habsburg Empire). Marsigli made the necessary correction immediately but, the British agent of Italian origin noted in his report, the prince replied “smiling that even if I had said that I was English, he would have thought I was German anyway”²³. Unfortunately, we do not have other comments to help us reconstitute the causes and the effects of the confusion, although we believe that it was interpreted by foreigners as a proof of negligence on behalf of the prince or as the latter’s ignorance in terms of political, ethnic and geographical knowledge.

The second case of confusion was found in the context of verbal communication and it has to do with not knowing the language and, consequently, with a different interpretation of the message sent to the other. Being part of the Swedish mission and travelling through Moldavia and Ukraine (1656-1658), Conrad Iacob Hildebrand experienced several adventures in Moldavia, some of them even amusing. One evening during the winter holidays, he recounts, after having got lost, he eventually entered a house. Here, the landlord, not understanding German, but appearing to do so, lead him “up to a street corner, blew his candle off and jumped into a dark corner while I remained alone in the snow again”²⁴. For sure this is not just a case of linguistic confusion, the Romanians’ hard feelings for foreigners’ uniforms being clear but not hostile, especially that „pătitul” noticed that, during the same attempt of reaching “his camp”, when mingling with some “merrymakers”, they rejected him, pulling him “gently”²⁵ away.

The last situation that we want to refer to refers to the confusion created by the wrong perception of the dress code. Generally speaking, the clothes represented an element of social and ethnic nature, which helped establishing the social status of its wearer and his/her ethnic affiliation as well.

Being subordinated to the interest of simplifying the inter-human relations, the association between the clothes and the specificity of a people quickly became a stereotype of appreciating the Other²⁶ in the era, even if it was sometimes confusing. In Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli’s *Relation*, we meet such an event which, unfortunately, had tragic effects. Thus, while in Oradea, the emissary and his Turkish companions were attacked by other Turks, in reality Serbians disguised as Turks, “who came to get their revenge for the slaughter committed by the Tatars”. In the confusion created (“we did not know whether we were attacked by Turks or by Christians”), the emissary accounted, the courier did not lose his temper, but took

²³ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. VIII, 1983, p. 56.

²⁴ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. V, 1973, p. 598.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Mihaela Grancea, *Stereotipuri etnoculturale în discursul istoriografic (Ethno-cultural stereotypes in the historiographic discourse)*, in “Provincia”, no. 3, year II, 2001, p. 6.

the firman of the sultan Ahmed II (1691-1695), and “courageously welcoming the enemies’ fire he shouted: *The proof, the proof!* I myself with the King Ludovic’s (German) passport in hand shouted: *If you are German, look, I come on behalf of the Emperor*”. Besides the emphasis upon the danger through which the emissary had passed, the chance of survival was explained by the prestige he had gained in those territories, because he was recognised by the leader of those Serbs who “threw himself at my feet, begging for forgiveness”²⁷.

Religion was also a factor of labelling and social unity. Thus, a military confrontation between “Christians” and “pagans” was postponed by the Tatars while being prepared because it was Friday and they “celebrate Friday” the same way “the Christians celebrate Sunday”²⁸. The “custom” was not breached although this might have fuelled the warrior spirit of the enemies, thus hastening the unfolding of the hostilities.

Even if we have not managed to grasp and analyse all the examples necessary to formulate complete and unbeatable conclusions, one cannot avoid relating our observations to the present realities. We have found common elements, at a different scale of course, which strengthen the confidence in the power to change and in the inevitable evolution of human society. Within the contemporary context, such “confusions” generated in the diplomatic, linguistic and cultural field have been emphasised and made public by the mass media. Of course, they can not be tolerated but maybe neither can they be blamed, their justification being totally inefficient. Breaking the language and cultural codes may yield hilarity, or can betray insufficiency, ignorance or adverstity, fact which generates the state of conflict in the inter-human relations.

In conclusion, we can only underline the fact that an attempt to examine the problems raised by communication, as they can be depicted from the notes of the foreign travellers who crossed the Romanian territory, can not be done exhaustively within one simple study but, provided the fact that the subject has stirred an interest, opening new vistas for analysis, it means it reached at least one point specific to research: that of encouraging the critical approach necessary for the continuation of such a scientific enterprise.

²⁷ *Călători (Travellers)*, vol. VIII, 1983, pp. 58-59.

²⁸ Miron Costin, *Letopiseşul ţării Moldovei de la Aron vodă încoace (The chronicle of Moldavia since Prince Aron)*, in *Opere*, ed. P.P.Panaitescu, Bucharest, 1958, p. 192.

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