Culture and Globalization

Personalities, Cultural Identity,
Intercultural Dialogue: V.A. Urechia

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Abstract: Considering, as Tzvetan Todorov does, that "the intercultural dimension is part of the cultural dimension" and that personalities assumed different roles, according to the historic circumstances, the ideative sphere of the time, and the specific internal mechanisms of generating elites that each culture has, the goal of this paper is to provide a few comments on the personalities' contribution in the intercultural dialogue, starting from the critical examination of the role that V.A. Urechia (1834-1901) - historian, politician and man of letters – had in redefining the national Romanian identity and in the development of the Romanian-Spanish cultural relations at the end of the 19th century. Applying the classical Freudian psychodynamic pattern of the personality structure to the culture, we propose a new point of view on the personalities' role in intercultural dialog.

Keywords: intercultural dialog; V. A. Urechia; Romanian identity; classical Freudian psychodynamic pattern of the personality; elites

1. Introduction

Throughout the cultural history, personalities assumed different roles, according to the historic circumstances, the ideative sphere of the time and the specific internal mechanisms of generating elites that each culture has. But the question is whether personalities do have a more important contribution to the intercultural dialogue than the ordinary members of the respective communities. We will try to verify this idea by examining Urechia role in the redefining the Romanian Identity and, also, his role in the Romanian – Spanish intercultural relations.

2. Historical Context

Better appreciated and known in his time than by posterity, V.A. Urechia (1834-1901) carried on his activity in the latter part of the 19th century (named "the nationalities' century" in Europe) and the beginning of the 20th century. This period belongs to *the age of the national Romanian regeneration*, marked by two

revolutions and culminating with The Principalities Union in 1859 and the institutionalization of the principles formulated in 1848, which would prepare the reunification and completion of the Romanian national state as soon as Transilvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina were jointed to Romania in 1918 (Zub, 1985, p. 72).

This followed after a period characterized by the existence of several Romanian feudal states (Moldavia, the Romanian Country, Transilvania, Dobrogea) that, although initially independent, came under Ottoman suzerainty, hardly keeping their internal autonomy.

For starting a dialogue after the end of the Phanariot age – the most difficult stage of the Ottoman domination for the Romanian countries – the *redefining of the national Romanian identity* was a necessary stage.

It was noticed that "historians everywhere had a say in the crystallization of the national conscience" (Zub, 1991, p. 57), that the historians in the centre and south-east of Europe were, according to R.W.Seton-Watson, "a political force", assuming the mission of shaping the reality (qtd. in Zub, 1991). Al. Zub pointed out also that the age of the Romanian national regeneration was under"the sign of historicism" (returning to the past in order to incorporate its everlasting values, on whose grounding the edifice of the new society could be organically built) and the dilemma of "writing or making history" was resolved through the terms' conjunction, in the Romanian society of the time (Zub, 1981)

Al.I. Cuza, the first ruler of the United Principalities, schooled in Paris in a decisive period for the Principalities Union, ranges among these men of letters who contributed to the redefining of the Romanian national identity (Berindei, 2000).

During that age, the prestige and identity of the Romanians under Ottoman suzeranity, aspiring to national emancipation, were felt as being unsatisfying, thus some valuating strategies being adopted.

3. V. A. Urechia's Contribution to the Redefining of the Romanian National Identity

V. A. Urechia was one of the most active Cuza's collaborators. His activity was approached by different points of view by the Romanian historiography (see Goia, 1979, Popa, 2001). Starting from the results of these efforts and according to Azzi

and Klein theory (Azzi & Klein, 1998), we would affirm that Urechia contributed to the development of a classical *strategy of identification* based on the collective action through the medium of some positive differentiations achieved through the reflexivity of integration. It is about emphasizing the feeling regarding the affiliation to the large pan-Latin movement without losing the previous affiliations and obtaining a recognition and representation not sufficiently maintained until then, and also indistinct because of the Ottoman suzerainty.

The ideas of *Latinity* and *unity* were constant values of his thinking and actions; on such a basis he would define the *Romanian spirit* as a movement of advancing the national identity, part of the large pan-Latin movement of the time. In the Introduction to the *Course of Romanians' History*, taught at the University of Bucharest, in 1865, Urechia approached the concept of *nation* and offered a general view of its connections with the notions of individual, family, people and distinguished the particular features for a good definition (Urechia, 1865, p.71).

In his opinion, the nation's main features were represented by the common language and origin and the affiliation to a community which came to understand the self-conscience of its *role* and its individuals *in the civilization general work*, by studying its ethnical roots, its traditions and history, its shared feelings and ideas.

He interpreted *the mission of the Romanian nation* by historically analyzing the tendencies of the European evolution and the constant values of the Romanian foreign politics *as contributing to the peacekeeping in Europe, by enhancing the importance of its geographical position which allowed it to play an important role in influencing the balance between the Great Powers of the zone, belonging to the three races, Latin, Slav and German, which shared the continent.* (Urechia, 1882, p. 110)

The influence of Herder's theory is obvious in highlighting the historic mission continuity of the "Romanian country" founded by Traian in Dacia as an obstacle against the barbarians and for ensuring the internal peace within the civilized Europe. (Urechia, 1869, p.18)

In Urechia's view, the completion of the Union was the Romanian spirit's supreme objective, the circumstance in which the Romanian nation could fulfil its role "in the civilization's general work" as valuable part of Latinity.

Romania, as an unitary and independent national state or as a confederate state, part of the Carpathian-Balkan Confederation, of the United States of Oriental Europe or of a Latin Confederation were variants considered by Urechia, the historian, trying to dip the zone's and the Romanian nation's future and establish the tasks of the present. (Popa, 2001, p. 178)

4. Urechia's Role in the Development of the Romanian-Spanish Intercultural Relations

We have written an article about Urechia's role in the development of the Romanian-Spanish intercultural relations, showing that he was the first Romanian Hispanist and that this Spanish experience influenced his vision and activity (Popa, 2010; Păltănea, 1988; 1992). His marriage, in 1857, with Francoise Josephine Dominique Plano, the daughter of Queen Isabela's of Spain personal doctor, made him to show a constant interest and to maintain strong connection with the Spanish cultural space. His "capital of Spanish education" was acquired by having attended courses in the University of Madrid, by investigating the activity of the Athenaeum in Madrid, the Spanish archives (Popa, 2001, p. 178). He was able to establish significant contacts through the medium of his wife's family and the Literary Circle of his brother-in-law, the well-known publisher Charles Bally-Bailliere as: Emilio Castelar, his rival to residency, Pi Y.Margall, partisan of the federalization of peoples speaking different languages, a future minister of the Spanish, Emanoil del Palacio, N.Rivero, Fernando de Castro, Juan Oliva y Mila, a librarian at "Balaguer", Albert de Quintana. Many of them kept the same interest to Romanian history and culture, have visited Romania, or have written books on our country. Urechia used these relations for serving the cause of the Romanians across the mountains or to keep Romania connected with the ideals of Latinity, even with that of federalization of Latin peoples in Europe and America. (Urechia, 1900, f.1)

Books as "Oriente", by Emilio Castelar, did not forget the Romanians, as well as personalities like Albert Qintana supported the Romanian movement of national regeneration and tried to make the supreme and suveran principle of Latin brotherhood penetrate the population soul (Popa, 2010, p. 10).

We pointed out that "*the intensity of the Spanish cultural life of the time impressed V. A. Urechia who established valuable connections and remarked the political and cultural institutions, thinking of modernizing his own country*"(A. Popa,

2010). The statute of the Romanian Athenaeum created in 1860 was almost transposing the Statute of the Athenaeum from Madrid.

V.A. Urechia had an important role in the Romanian-Spanish intercultural dialogue, becoming the first Romanian Hispanist. He contributed to the redefining of the Romanian national identity in the new historic context, of the system of affiliations, identifying a reference model in the Spanish culture, which was a source of inspiration for contributing to the development of his own country whose evolution had been hindered by the abuses of the Ottoman Empire as a suzerain power.

Urechia kept a particular place for the Spanish culture- that he approached more than any other of his contemporaries, that he showed a special love to and related himself to, trying to define himself as an individual and citizen of a kindred nation solidary with the European destiny.

5. Do Personalities have a more Important Role in the Intercultural Dialog?

Starting from these conclusions we will try to answer to the question whether personalities do have a more important contribution to the intercultural dialogue than the ordinary members of the respective communities. Shapir talked about "the personality as model or a metaphor for culture" and studied "the impact of culture on personality" and (Shapir, 2002, p. 10) and F. L. K. Hsu, published in 1961 "Aproaches to Culture and Personality" suggesting a new name for this direction of research: Psychological anthropology. (Hsu, 1961)

By reversing the perspective, we want to propose a new angle on the impact that personalities (as outstanding people, with high intelectual and moral qualities) have on the cultures and on the intercultural dialog.

Answering to the question about the rapport of the cultural/intercultural dimension, Tzvetan Todorov considered that "the intercultural dimension is part of the cultural dimension." (Todorov , 1989, p. 45)

Indeed, culture implies the intercultural dimension both at an individual level and also at the level of communities, ethnic groups, and nations. As structures communicating through their members, cultures regard their *personalities* as being the *clearest mirrors* in which the other is recognized as being familiar or different.

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Personalities' appreciations and their social activity have a more extended response at the level of the whole community sharing the respective culture.

According to Mead and Mucchielli, for each individual, *the self* represents the place where the identity is built through the constant dialogue between the *ego-subject* referring to the personal autonomy and the *ego-object* or "*the me*" which is based on the collective attitudes and social rules (Mead, 1963, Mucchielli, 1986, p. 47). The *self* would allow the complex agreement between the collective and individual identities, between the social norms and the subject's autonomy, between what changes the self-image and appearances and what is permanent. As far as personalities are concerned, it should be pointed out that the distinctive feature is given by the ego-subject's prevailing importance in the form of the self, thus favoring the comparisons and ensuring a more active role in the process of dialogue and identification.

However, returning to the classical Freudian psychodynamic pattern of the personality structure, we can state that considering the national culture/national being as a whole, it is the personalities' action that highlights the individuality, the community's ego. And that it is placed at the level of the conscious, being able to balance the requirements and demands coming from the profound self of the nation, with the reality, the concrete historic background and with the norms and aspirations reflecting the system of values, traditions of the respective community/culture i.e., its superego. The process is a dynamic one, implying a permanent process of redefining its own identity and a continuous intercultural dialogue.

In his *History of the National Culture. History of Schools from 1860-1864,* V.A. Urechia himself, pointed out his opinion on the personalities' role in the cultural history, considering that: "*The image of the past times shows that the great, indefatigable performer aiming at the prosperity of peoples is not represented by the masses and their collectivity, but by several individuals who, due to the intelligence of their mind, a particular feature of their brain, due to some propitious circumstances, rise over the common level of the people as the mountain over the field. The historian can find connections between the people and those great personalities, but he has to distinguish the warp given by peoples from the hard work without which the cloth of culture cannot exist, the hard work given by the people's great personalities.*" (Urechia, 1892, p. 6).

6. Conclusions

Our analysis and Urechia's statement confirm the personalities' more important role in the defining of the cultural identity and in the intercultural dialog and explains, even, the image that Urechia had on his own existence and activity. This approach raises, in the same time, the problem of the mechanism that each culture has to create personalities and elites during different stages of their history.

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