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Dialogul cu celălalt – de la închistare la autodezvăluire

Rezumat

În lucrarea de față, axată pe analiza de tip imagologic, încercăm să reliefăm necesitatea și importanța dialogului în relația cu Celălalt plecând de la menționarea rolului mecanismului *autodezvăluirii.* Utilizând acest mecanism corpusul social beneficiază de oportunitatea de a oferi audienței elementele esențiale ce definesc propria identitate astfel încât efectul să fie acela de totală deschidere a fluxurilor comunicaționale cu ceilalți (percepuți ca străini), dar și de articulare și armonizare a tiparelor relaționale în societate. În acest mod imaginile stereotipale negative își pot pierde treptat din capacitatea de difuzare între generații, estompându-se lent într-un proces care duce, în final, la pierderea forței de penetrare în mentalul colectiv, la repoziționări și ajustări comportamentale față de celălalt.

Luând în discuție un exemplu deja "clasic" de stereotip negativ, anume imaginea evreului, am subliniat încă o dată grava lejeritate cu care o întreagă etnie poate fi stigmatizată și supusă unei presiuni imagologice incredibile, mergând până la diabolizarea totală. Iar efectele, de-a lungul unei istorii de două mii de ani, au fost devastatoare.

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Key words: identity, communication, imagology, self-revealment, dialogue, collective mindscape.

The Dialogue with the Other – from Seclusion to Self-Revealment

Summary

The present paper, based on an imagological type of analysis, tries to set into relief the necessity and importace of the dialogue in relation with the Other starting from the discussion of the mechanism of *self-revealment.* Using this mechanism the social corpus benefits of the opportunity to offer its audience the essential elements defining one's own identity so that the effect should be that of a total opening of the channels of communication with the Other (perceived as stranger), but also of articulating and harmonizing the relational patterns in society. Thus, the negative stereotypal images could gradually lose from their capacity of being transmitted over generations, slowly fading in a process that finally leads to the loss of their penetreating force in the collective mindscaspe, leading to repositioning and behavioural adjustments towards the other.

Taking as point of departure in discussion an already „classical" example of negative stereotype, namely the image of the Jew, we have underlined once again the condamnable ease with which a whole nation can be stigmatized and subjected to incredible imagological pressure up to total diabolization. And its effects during a two thousand year history have been devastating.

The Dialogue with the Other – from Seclusion to Self-Revealment

Imagology, a field of research that structures its approach starting from ethnography, anthropology, sociology or history, psychology or literature, has come back with much force to the attention of specialists. The extremely complex approach, interdisciplinarily founded, imagology has outlined its status as an autonomous social discipline in accordance with the conceptual clarifications established at the 16th International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Stuttgart in 1985, where the theme proposed for discussion and analysis was the image of the Other. No doubt, it is not only the image of the Other that constitutes the object of study for imagology, since besides, it has in view in fact a whole mental scaffolding, collective or individual, that sketches and coherently defines a certain image and, in particular, the image of the Other. This mindscape contains a series of particularities, details and data concerning the surrounding reality and, implicitely, about the Other. The data (pieces of information) obtained from the social medium consitute in fact the real message-vectors. The pieces of information contained in these messages emitted by the Other are either a result of the manifestations of the Other's existence or the reception of the statement the other expresses about her/himself. Let us remember here that, in the modern epoch, in this binomial dynamic *I – the other,* another comunnicational sequence has intervened: the revealment of oneself. In order to define in a few words this concept it has to be said that self-revealment represents the capacity of the social actors to provide their audience some essential data about their own identity, having a decisive role in the opening of interpersonal realtionships, but also in the articulation and harmonization of the relational patterns in a certain society. Such an opening up towards the Other is esentially conditioned by the specificity of the socio-cultural context in which the individual develops and less due to the genetic endowments of the subject engaged in the realtionship. Self- revealment enters essentially in the category of universal processes but its amplitude, the nature of information vehiculated and the options of a certain interlocutor are influenced by the specificity of the oritentation of one's cultural values.

Concerning messages, as it has been shown above, these intervene in the process of communication becoming thus essential vectors in the sequences of the informational chain but, in the same time, also „mediators" between reality and the image of this reality. But in this situation an extremely dangerous distortion could intervene: these message-vectors could transform themselves into stereotypes (as one sees unfortunately happening in the approach to the image of the Other as a stranger). Since this is a real danger, it is necessary to show the importance of the distinction between reality and the way it is projected into words and images. To neglect this distinction becomes counterproductive, especially nowadays, in a tense European context it might have unwanted consequences (if it does not already have such consequences thinking of the realtionship between muslims and Europeans).

As regards the same message-vectors one can observe that the one who receives the messages about the other, in the same way, can receive messages about himself or herself. As consequences of this process appear the images about oneself (or self-images), extremely important in the self-evaluation of human groups[2]. The two types of imagologic perceptions (the image of the other and the images of oneself) are in a strong dependence, the considerations about oneself and the perception of the others transposed in images are always doubled with judgements and images of the self.

The human being's interest in the Other has been signaled as early as the dawn of the coagulation and structuring of human society and has been stimulated especially by fear (easy to understand) of all that was alien. We think here of the ancestral fear with strong resorts in the self-presevation instinct, a feeling that has not left mankind along the millennia and that nowadays it is present even if man as well as human society in its whole have suffered profound changes, i. e. changes of structure, certainly fundamental. Nevertheless, could we ask ourselves about the intimate mechanism, the key factors that

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[2]   In counterpoint with the self image there is the image of the Ohter , quite different from ourselves. Such images have been given the name of heteroimages.

Evreul cu gâsca (1880), pictură în ulei de N. Grigorescu

have maintained this feeling of fear of the other?

In order to answer such a question one has to begin with analyzing the *I – You* relationship becoming aware of our own limits and spiritual „instabilites". First of all one has to remark the fact that viewing the problem in binomial terms *identity-alterity* presupposes evidently the acceptance of another identity. In the moment this acceptance has been assumed, its direct consequence is: the comparison between one's own image, familiar (thus known) and a strange one (thus unknown), a source of fear and anguish. The sense of fear (an effect of the comparison) can be explained by the intital reaction, almost unconscious, to reject those who do not use the same set of cultural symbols. There is a strong tendency to use „the standars of one's own group in the evaluation of other groups and to situate the *in*-group at the top of the symbolic hierarchy of prestige, while setting the *out*-group, on lower ranges" [3]. Such an attitude is fixated evidently on the position of ethnocentrism whose dominant note is the rejection of any cultural matrix (aesthetic, ethical, religious, behavioural) different from those recognized and practised in its own group. Thus, a point can be reached at which one would think that only one's own cultural norms are the „corret" and „moral" ones, only the known symbolic systems are „justified", and whatever is different is only „acceptable". Such a way of relating to the other leads to considering the other's behaviour lacking meaning and symbolically „viciated".

As strange as it may seem, it is exactly this fear, the ancestral fear that subjugates man, that had been the psychological mechanism that lead man to the other, the stanger, and made man try thus to learn about and descipher an other ethno-cultural model. All at once, the other becomes a necessary mirror of one's self. Hence, from this first step of „mirroring", human affectivity and psychism develops continually on a long way up to the perception of the other as an existence somehow similar but still „otherwise". The awareness of the other triggers the curiosity finally responsible for one's bringing closer the other's image to one's own. Thus certain stereotypes of thought, language, and manifestation are created, which could be identified in the sphere of symbols and symbolyzing the images that finally outline identity, respectively alterity. And all these above mentioned images teach one sometimes much more „about the real than the real itself"[4]. One understands thus why images have as many meanings as many individuals exist. Meaning that each human being models his or her own existence relating to the meaning of the world (a world he or she has created) benefitting of its continuous re-signification and re-semantification. Consequently the world is imbued with our subjectivity that proposes and manouvers the images but still there is, in the same time, a regulating tendency that tries to reinstall the equilibrium in this process (with a psychic subtratum). This reaction is a consequence of the before-mentioned mechanism of comparing. In other words, social reality functions according to the dichotomy *us-the others, the good ones – the evil ones,* and the structuring of identity starts with defining oneself through differentiation from alterity, through the sometimes agressively expressed rejection of the Other. By means of the mechanism that sustains the comparison with the Other, it imposed a tendency, confirmed in attribution theories, to asign a positive attribution to oneself and the group one belongs to, and a negative attribution to the Other.[5] The process of reflecting the Other as a consequence of the mechanism of comparison represents an essential component of the social imaginary, while delimiting oneself in the relation to alterity comes to offer the group the possibility to affirm its own identity, a fundamental element in the construction of the identitary discourse.

Attempting an analysis concerning the understanding of the *identity-alterity* relationship from the perspective of the mythology of human groups, one would reach similar conclusions. In the imaginary of communities the Other (seen as the stranger) has a representation leading to the same dichotomic kind of associations: an association with a potential of danger, most of the time seen as an embodiment of evil, appears as a natural reaction (more correctly called primary). Thus first, hidden powers and inimical intentions are attributed to the Other (the stranger, the unknown) who is considered the one to disbalance the equilibrium of the place by affecting the existing rules and customs the entire

[3]   Alin Gavreliuc, *Psihologie interculturală, repere teoretice și diagnoze românești*, Ed. Polirom, 2011, pp. 42-43.

[4]   Jean Jacques Wunenburger, *Viața imaginilor*, Ed. Cartimpex, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 20.

[5]   H. Tajfel, *Social identity and intergroup relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 52-53.

community religiously respects. In this case the collective imaginary imposes what may be called a negative stereotype. Secondly, another type of image could be drawn, taken to an extreme idealization, that consitutes the positive stereotype. The perception of the Other imposed through the two types of stereotypical attitudes proves the failure of common logic due to a dangerous and counterproductive schematization with unpredictable consequences to human communities. These stereotypes pass from one generation to another being step by step transformed into commonplaces of the social thought. Stereotypes (both negative and postive) are ultimately consequences of the two diametrically opposed attitudes of the human being: rejection or acceptance.

One of the best known examples in history of a during generations transmitted negative stereotype is the image of the Jew. Along the centuries, the Eurpean world (both East and West) perpetuated this stereotype that has been dangerously anchored in the social mindscape, becoming a commonplace that finally had awful consequences on a continentent considered civilized. Such tragic events cannot be explained devoid of this negative stereotype about the Jew (or the Jews), an image that had begun to emerge and be intensely vehiculated in France, Italy and England since the 13th century[6]. The first (insitutionalized) stage had been the ethnic stigmatization imposed by the obligativity that all the Jews should wear a distinctive sign of diverse forms but of the same colour: yellow. From this moment on, in Europe begins a lengthy process of negative streotypical structuring, so that the Jew is „endowed" with a series of characteristics worth being blamed. Thus, the usurer Jew and the dishonest tradesman, the coward and fearing Jew, the traitor ready to sell his country, up to the identification with the red man and the sorcerer („solomonar" in Romanian), there is a whole range of negative accents (even demonic) with which he is endowed. Such an impulse/tendency to associate the Other, the stranger, with sorcerers and demonic characters from the mythic folklore comes from the belief that the Jew, who is not christened, is a certain and easy prey to the Devil. The history of the Jew's diabolization is much older than that, beginning with the firs Christian texts, especially with John's Gospel in which Jesus considers the Jews who do not believe in him „Satan's offsprings". As raising against Christ, the Jew had been considered an embodiment of Antichirist. Hence there was only one step to accuse the Jews of ritual infanticide or deicide. Thus, as Jean Delumeau has stated, the Jew was perceived as „an absolute evil", as an extremely dangerous „agent of Satan" , the source of spreading various psychoses and mass fobias during the entire period of European Middle Ages[7]. With the passage of the centuries and the distancing from the „dark age", this stereotypical image had gradually faded but some demonizing accents survivied up to the 20th century, having been used in the Nazi discourse (godlike-man, satanic-man, the arian and respectively the Jew).

It has been already stated that the stereotypical images have a certain permanence, a certain immobilism, so that some of them can be identified even after long expenses of time (the Jew as satan etc.). But nevertheless, the images nationwide are not fixed for once and for all; on the contrary, they have their own cynetics, being subjected to metamorphosis (even if very slow). This finding is valid evidently from a diachronic perspective. If one attempts an anylsis on a synchronic level, one would be surprised to identify the coexistence of several images, not seldomly divergent. In certain cases a community perceives an ethnic group with a twofold image made of contradictory extremes. This bipolar imagologic imprint comes from the very elements of reality. This could be seen also in the case of the Jew. If it is to give a single example in this sense one could mention a stereotype with double accents quite widespread around the beginning of the 20th century: all Jewish women are beautiful/ all Jewish women are ugly [8].

Finally, instead any conlusion, let us remark the fact that whenever the process of individual affirmation is analysed, as well as that of the collective one, it is very important to understand that such a clarifying process cannot be achieved without a context of authentic communication with alterity. The

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[6]   Andrei Oişteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română,* ediţia a II-a, Ed. Humanitas, Bucureşti. 2004, pp. 115-116.

[7]   Jean Delumeau, *Frica în Occident (secolele XIV-XVIII). O cetate asediată,* Ed. Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1986, vol. II, pp.140-186

[8]   Andrei Oişteanu, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

Other becomes thus one's mirror, allowing the personal validation, influence, adjustments and developments. So as that the Other could perform its function he or she must have access to an informational fund as correct and profound as one can offer. This is when self-revealment enters the stage. Its role is decisve in the contructinon of bridges for dialogue between individuals belonging to different ethnic groups, so to say, beneficiaries of different cultural matrices. And, as a consequence, a major effect of self-revealment is the diminishing of stereotypical pressure. Unfortunately the relationship among the Jews and the communities next to which or with whom they had lived togehter, at least during the modern age, suffered very much exactly because of a defficitary dialogue. And this, first of all, because of the uncapacity (of both sides) to develop the only viable way to further mutual knowlege: self-revealment. The consequences are recorded in dark pages of history.

Nowadays, the world is more and more culturally heterogenious and the consequences of globalization are more and more evident, sometimes brutal, the differences among cultures are a phenomenon accompanied by the introduction and use of new stereotypical images. Nowadays' accelerated migration stimulates and structures substantial changes in the ethnic composition of many communities. Thus, very different people will be obliged to live together. The contact with the „different other" represents a real opportunity to interogate ourselves about our own identity. In the situation of integration into a new culture each individual will be obliged to revise his or her own identity, something that implies a series of reformulations and transformations. Such intercultural experiences are, in the same time, identitary experiences in which the awareness of the self and the feeling of identity suffer metamorphoses, sometimes dramatic. In order to face these provocations, in the same time with the elimination of borders, it is necessary to actively participate in the process of structuring a European identity and supporting the focalised effort towards understanding, openness, and tolerance.

Evreu în sinagogă; foto: Silviu Gheție

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