

NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ROMANIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES

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Abstract: *The national identity and the psychological specificity of the Romanian people have been approaches of interest from the beginning of psychology as science in Romania. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru imposed it as a distinct theme in the 1930s, since then it constantly returned to attention. In the context of celebrating the centenary, the approach to describing national characteristics in terms of psychological features has become both current and desirable. The paper presents succinct approaches of some authors from the 20th century (Dumitru Draghicescu, Constantin Radulescu-Motru, Mihai Ralea), as well as a cognitive-experimental approach (Daniel David, 2015). In addition, they outline an approach that goes beyond the boundaries of psychology, thus contributing to the theme of national identity in Romanian cultural space.*

Keywords: *identity; traits*

1. INTRODUCTION

The psychological approach to national characteristics is closely linked to the beginnings of psychology as a science. Wilhelm Wundt, founder of experimental psychology, published between 1900 and 1920 a complex work entitled *Völkerpsychologie. Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetz von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*.

Wundt compares the relationship between *Völkerpsychologie* and experimental psychology with the one of psychology and physiology: each approach offers an alternative perspective to each other and each one completes one another in different ways. At its beginnings, *Völkerpsychologie* was a field of theoretical study, defined as such by the founder of psychology as experimental science. Later, it was used in connection with Nazi ideology, which made it gradually lose its momentum. Also, its foundation on the theory of substantiation / essentialization of a nation's ethos has not proved its validity.

The implicit psychological approach to the characteristics of the Romanian people can be noticed first in philosophical works, starting with those of Dimitrie Cantemir, which is also mentioned in Ion Manzat's psychology history treaty (2007: 979). The theme was consecrated with the work of *Psychology of the Romanian People* (1937/2012) by Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, who obtained the Ph.D. title (with a theme of philosophy) under the guidance of W. Wundt.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF ROMANIAN NATIONALITY IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Remarkably, the main contributions in the field of psychology to the characteristics of the Romanian people were made in the past by personalities with a true encyclopaedic vocation. That is why the works that address the psychological characteristics specific to the Romanian people can not be considered as belonging only to psychology, they have since the appearance and until now notable effects on the Romanian cultural space.

In the 20th century there were several authors who approached this topic. In this article, only the contributions of Dumitru Draghicescu (1875-1945), Constantin Rădulescu-Motru (1868-1941) and Mihai Ralea (1896-1964) are presented succinctly.

Dumitru Draghicescu was a philosopher, sociologist and Romanian diplomat (a quality that he worked closely with Nicolae Titulescu for the establishment of the League of Nations, in 1920). He remained in the history of Romanian psychology by introducing the first course of social psychology in the academic year 1905-1906 (Mânzat, 2007: 992) and especially through the work *Din psihologia poporului român* (en: *From the psychology of the Romanian people*) (1907/1995), which is the first monograph of this theme. Drăghicescu's volume is structured in 12

chapters, each of which can also be taken as an independent study. Although he was criticized for describing predominantly the negative psychological characteristics to the detriment of the positive ones (in a manner similar to Dimitrie Cantemir), Draghicescu expresses "confidence in the characteristics of the great future of the soul, which << hide or are reduced in the contexts of certain vicissitudes of our history >> ... << The riches of our mentality have been stopped instead of their development, they have waited and waiting for good circumstances to come to light >> "(Mânzat, 2007: 991).

Although it has been more than a century since its publication, Drăghicescu's work contains passages of surprising timeliness, such as those on the "subdued character," seen as a "protective reflex" stemming from the lack of confidence of the Romanian peasant face of everything meaning "official administration", being associated (at the time when the book was written) with the "disinterest" and "non-involvement". Both in the preface and in the introduction to his work, Dumitru Draghicescu emphasizes that this is a "first volume" and stresses the difficulties of the proposed approach: "we hope that the object of the research will not go too far the limits of our powers "(Draghicescu, 1937:19), in the conditions in which the work was written in a "transitional period". In fact, the work appears in 1907, the year of the great peasant riots, a historical phenomenon in which there was sufficient involvement and interest in social change. As such, Draghicescu's claims regarding the limits of his approach had an immediate confirmation.

Constantin Rădulescu-Motru held the first experimental psychology course at the University of Bucharest, being the author of *the Psychology Problems* (1898), which founded psychology as an autonomous science in the Romanian cultural context. He is recognized as the founder of the psychological school in Bucharest (focusing on experiment and psychometry), establishing the first experimental psychology laboratory in this university center (1906). In *Psychology of the Romanian People* (1937/2012), Rădulescu-Motru describes and explains the soul traits of the Romanian people by conjugating three factors: the hereditary biological fund; geographic environment and institutional features acquired with historical progress. Just like Drăghicescu, he warns of the difficulty of his approach: "In peoples with a newer culture and not so original, the difficulties remain high. Nearly unobserved. This

is the case of the social psychology of the Romanian people "(1937/2012: 15).

A major thesis of the paper is that of the specificity of Romanian individualism, considered to be of a distinct type from the occidental meaning of the term: "does not involve the spirit of initiative in the economic life and too little spirit of independence in the political and social life, the two attributes which characterizes the individualism of the Western cultures" (1937/2012: 18), but it is "a mere subjective reaction, an egocentrism, under the influence of the biological, hereditary factor" (1937/2012: 20). This feature is associated with a lack of perseverance, although there are remarkable exceptions, according to Rădulescu-Motru: agricultural work and professional occupations transmitted from one generation to the next.

The apparent contradiction is explained by

A mismatch between the hereditary factor and the institutional factor. The Romanian is, by its hereditary nature, persevering in work, as it is patient, conservative, traditional, but this hereditary nature has been perverted by a mistaken institutional life imitated by strangers. He is unproductive because the state institutions have forced him to improvisations (Rădulescu-Motru, 1937/2012: 26-27).

Regarding the psychological characteristics of the Romanian people, Rădulescu-Motru describes both some unfavorable (disorderly work - done in leaps, the lack of commercial spirit, the poor use of time) and more favorable ones: welcoming, tolerant, religious-loving. The enumeration is not sufficient for the pursued approach, the characterization of "the function these qualities and defects have in the Romanian people's soul unity", in the context in which the big problem is the "Romanian spiritual purpose." In this context, the final phrase of the work keeps its topicality:

Shame is not for the people who are very well known it's different to the glorious and powerful peoples, but it is ashamed for the people who have no courage to know their fate and destiny (1937 / 2012: 53).

Mihai Ralea was a psychologist, sociologist, esthetician, philosopher, essayist and Romanian political scientist with a Ph.D. in economic and political science and another one in letters. In the *"Romanian Phenomenon"* anthology (1997), his main writings on national specificity are reunited. As far as the psychological characteristics are

concerned, Ralea describes the two poles, Western-type individualism, and passive resignation, typical of the Oriental, among which there is a "intermediate structure" of soul structure: adaptability. Starting from adaptability, Ralea describes the transactional spirit and manner in which the Romanian people survived throughout history. The power of adaptation comes from the conjugation of the following factors: the spirit of observation; the exact understanding of the situation; feeling rather than passion; unconditional will; resourceful spirit, sometimes through the use of unorthodox means.

Adaptability is proven, says Ralea, by the ease with which Romanians learn foreign languages and adapt to another culture. The demographic evolution of the last decades, in which millions of Romanians have gone abroad definitively (adapting to adoption language and culture), only supports this statement.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Daniel David published in 2015 a book titled *Psychology of the Romanian People*, a title chosen in consonance with the mention that

the work is a tribute to academician Constantin Rădulescu-Motru and his mentor, the founder of experimental psychology, Wilkelm Wundt (2015:6).

The subtitle's explanation also describes the specificity of his approach: "We have included a sub-title - *The Romanian Psychological Profile in a Cognitive-Experimental Monography* - to show that I will not just summarize a simple psychological / psychological analysis, but that these psychological aspects will be included in a comprehensive psychological profile that can then have various uses "(David, 2015: 15). The book includes research carried out over a decade (2005-2015), having three declared objectives (David, 2015: 18):

- 1) achieving a modern synthesis of the Romanian psychological attributes;
- 2) providing a self-knowledge opportunity for Romanians, based on scientific knowledge, and
- 3) developing a scientific monograph on the psychological attributes of Romanians, contributing to Romanian culture.

The conclusions of his book relate to three perspectives (David, 2015: 322-323):

1. How can we (relative to the US and the Western world, in general):

We have a high potential for intelligence, creativity and learning. The personality structure allows both positive and negative expressions, depending on us that we are shaping through the social institutions we create;

2. How we are (compared to the US and the Western world): the high potential described above is not capitalized, while

the personality structure, often defensive, sometimes supports too many negative aspects (for example, skepticism / cynicism). Instead, we have a great need to prove our value (potential), which makes us competitive in work, but competitiveness, unsustainable cooperation for success and perseverance through discipline often does not lead to efficiency;

3. How do we think we are. The Romanians consider themselves to be

alternating between individualism (more selfish) and collectivism, and between perseverance (especially from interest and / or stubbornness) and the unpredictability.

A "surprising result of the work" is that no major differences were found between the old Romanian provinces, a matter that Daniel David explained as "probably as a result of common education / socialization and globalization over the past 100 years" (David, 2015:323).

This relative psychological homogeneity of the psychological traits of the Romanians can be capitalized in the double sense: by using the work for the purpose of self-knowledge and for the foundation of public policies based on the psychological premises of the Romanians, because "with some well-thought public policies, the potential psychologically can be transformed into reality "(David, 2015: 330).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The approach of the identity and the psychological characteristics of the Romanian people has been a topic of interest in Romanian psychology since the beginning of the 20th century. Authors such as Dumitru Draghicescu, Constantin Radulescu-Motru and Mihai Ralea have had remarkable contributions that have surpassed the boundaries of psychology, influencing the Romanian cultural field.

100 years after the Great Union, psychology can continue to contribute in the same way by providing information that facilitates (self) knowledge of the psychological traits specific to the Romanian people and formulating public policies in line with them. For this to be feasible, a continuity of the approach is necessary:

If we consider that a generation is about 20 years old, probably because it understands how the psychological profile of the Romanians changes according to the generational evolution, it would be worth publishing such a work every 20 years. If we want to better capture the changes in the surface profile ... perhaps the analysis would be worth every 10 years (David, 2015: 18).

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