

A SEARCH FOR STABILITY: RELIGION AS A SHELTER AND A SYMBOLIC MANIFESTATION OF IDENTITY

About the Fieldwork

After years of preparation and completion of the necessary preliminary studies the Department of Ethnology at the University of Szeged launched a long field-work project in the summer of 1996: studying the votive picture gallery at the pilgrimage place of Radna in today's western part of Romania. We have given our research outline the title of „picture cult and society, the methodology and techniques of anthropologic picture research”. As a working hypothesis we presupposed that the pictures that play significant roles in our everyday life's private and community spheres bear symbolic functions. It is especially true for the special places of community life, the sacred places, in our particular case, for the Catholic pilgrimage places. There are special forms of using pictures here i.e. the so-called votive pictures and objects. These were donated as votive tokens by believers who wished to underpin their pleas and express their thanks to the sacred place and the worshipped figure in this sacred place – Virgin Mary in our case – after their prayers have been listened to. We presupposed that in the examined multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural region of the Banat this Roman Catholic picture donating tradition has particular symbolic meanings of a religious, ethnic and cultural nature. Beyond these content matters we made a methodological attempt to show how and with what techniques such a gallery of many hundred pictures can be studied, analysed and interpreted.

At the site of our research, in Radna the tradition of picture donation still exists, therefore this practice can be observed, recorded and analysed. Further, the people who follow this practice can be interviewed. Thus the relation between the people and pictures and the people and the picture collection can be examined. We believed that the roles of the collection and the place could not only be observed in the everyday religious life but also in the region's society in general.

We structured the technical realisation of the research project in the following way: we inventoried the votive picture gallery of an estimated approximately 2000 pictures during our 10 days of summer fieldwork, i.e. we made detailed records, we described them in writing and we photographed them. Between 1998 and 2000 with the help of the record cards in the 'Radna archives' we found several living donators who we talked to about their relations with the picture gallery. These talks were deliberately placed in a biographical framework. This way attempted to embed the event, the episode of the picture donation in the context

of a wider life story. However, we extracted the biographical relevance: we were mostly interested in the impact of religion and church on people's lives, in other words the ethnic characters of the Roman Catholic church and the votive picture donating traditions were in focus. We endeavoured to examine this peculiar vernacular form of religious practice in light of the region's sociohistory and ethnic developments and we tried to discover the possible connections between these. We presupposed that this special Catholic tradition has its place among the tools that symbolically express religious and ethnic identity.

Our explanatory/analysing examinations mostly proved our presuppositions, nevertheless they raised many new problems and questions.¹

These historical reviews demonstrate that the region constantly goes through changes, which on the other hand are not concomitants of organic development but in most cases they are changes that take place under the impact of outer forces. These result in the most important characteristic of the region's life – especially in the modern era – the instability deriving from the non-organic development.

The Field: The Banat Region – Equilibrium of Differences

In the sixteenth century the southern part of the Hungarian Kingdom fell under the rule of the Osman-Turkish Empire for nearly two hundred years (Engel 1996). It was freed from the Turkish rule only in 1718 and that is the time since when the area has been referred to as the Banat. The area freed from the Turks by the help of guns was directed for long from Vienna directly as an independent administrative unit under the name of Banatus Temesvariensis. The repopularisation, recultivation and rejoining of the region in the empire's economic/social life started as a result of the Habsburg military and civil administration. (KOVÁCH 1998.) The region ended up with a developed agriculture and industry by the twentieth century. These processes and the conscious settlement policy implemented under the auspices of these processes resulted in the multicultural and polyglot image of the Banat in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.² The region had a special position until 1918 in Hungary then in Romania. Until 1918 the social scene was characterised by the fact that Germans, Hungarians and Romanians lived here nearly in the same number and with the same significance, which meant that despite Romanians being in a relative majority there, no ethnic domination was apparent in the region. This resulted in the emergence of often-cited ethnic tolerance in the region: in the background of which lay economic prosperity besides the ethnic equilibrium. The region's ethnic groups had

1 About the research in more detail see: BARNA 1999.

2 Bernadett Békési, Bernadett Kiss and Erika Anna Makovics: The Banat in Light of Historical-Statistical Data: The Administrative, Economic and Social History of the Region looks behind these issues citing further literature. For Broader historical context see VOLGYES 1981. 130-135.

different functions also in an economic sense and this underpinned and ensured their local role. The settlements – with the exception of the big towns – were generally ethnically homogeneous.

The region was divided between Romania and Serbia by the peace treaty that ended World War One and which divided Hungary into pieces. With this act a developed Central European region was annexed to the Balkans region, which had different mentality and was at a different stage of development deriving from its different historical background. A common characteristic feature of the divided (Hungarian, Romanian and Serbian) Banat is that civilisational disagreements and conflicts aggravates (HUNTINGTON 1998).³ Right after the annexation a large scale settlement of Orthodox Romanians and Serbians started as well as the expropriation of the local economy, the economic destruction of Germans and Hungarians and their gradual expulsion from the region, which was a way (and today still supported by the state) of solving the existing conflicts. The result was a great degree of assimilation among Hungarians and strong sporadication. Following the mass emigration of Germans after 1990 Romanians from Oltenia and Moldavia moved into the empty villages completely changing the ratio of ethnic groups in the Banat. (BODÓ 1997, GREFFNER 1996, RIESER 1992.)

Church Administration

The counties of Arad, Torontál, Temes and Krassó-Szörény that comprised the area of the Banat in the administrative sense belonged to the diocese of Csanád as far as church administration was concerned. Radna became one of the sacral centres of vernacular religiousness and of the episcopacy that revived in the eighteenth century with Temesvár/Timişoara being its municipality. The diocese was split into three parts in the decades following the 1920 Romanian and Serbian occupation: the episcopacies of Timișoara, Zrenjanin and today's Szeged-Csanád were established with Timișoara, Zrenjanin and Szeged being their centres respectively. (LOTZ 1980.) The Franciscan cloister of Radna was disconnected from the church province named after Saint John of Capistrano in 1926 and which was operating in the Great Hungarian Plain to the province named after the Hungarian King Saint Stephen, which was operating in Transylvania. The monks were always Hungarian and German similarly to the diocese's followers. The church schools were nationalised at the end of the 1940s, then the operation of the monastic orders was restricted. They were practically banned. The fierce prosecution and physical liquidation of churchmen, Catholic and Greek Catholic believers started. (ANDRÁS 1991, ZALATNAY 1991.)

³ This is also in connection with the historical direction changing movement of the Eastern and Western Christianity and civilisation's borders and within this process it is in connection with the judgement of the position of Hungary, Transylvania and the Banat. See also: BELUSZKY 1996, LENDVAI 1997, PÁNDI 1995.

The Possession of the Space

The area names, the river and mountain names, the names of settlements, the border regions' names and the street names do not only enable orienting ourselves and moving around with confidence (DOWNS-STEAD 1982, 17-50). The natural environment becomes a humanised space by its residents naming it, therefore taking possession of it. The name often gives indications of the community's past: it keeps the oral traditions alive, it is an „oral memorial”. The human being does not only mark the space, the space colour shapes with orientation and „taking possession” in mind but will and can also mark the locally fixed events of the human community living in that space with such memorials in space. This way history transforms the vertical dimension of time into an ever-present tense of synchrony. This is the reason why preserving historical architectural memorials: castle ruins, churches, old buildings and also narratives about these, memorial plaques, erecting statues and not so frequently – but nowadays more and more significantly and consciously – preserving natural phenomena (rocks, mountains, trees, waters etc.) has a distinctive significance and role. These manmade and natural objects also keep remembrance alive and hand it down through generations. With the help of these memorial places the neutral physical space becomes a „sacral” space that also contains symbolic content, it becomes a space that is amalgamated with the community's history, a space that is a homeland.

These spaces received their present shape over many centuries of organic development. This development resulted in the fact that the onomastics of an area reflect the region's historical past. All peoples possessing the geographical, physical land have left some trace behind: names of waters, mountains and settlements can refer to this not only in the Carpathian Basin but everywhere in the world. Apart from the peoples who humanised the land, ideologies and social endeavours may also have influenced this process especially in the centuries of the new age and the modern era. The Christian community christianised the land during the course of the previous millennium. The rise to the middle class and the civic (nation) states had similar ambitions: they formed a nation state framework with its help. Only ideologies and nationalisms striving for exclusive and total control attempted with force and with tools of power to change and restructure these organic processes in the past and in the present. The change in the geographical names always indicates the exclusive demand of a nation for expropriation or symbolic possession of a land.

Therefore the changing of the settlement and area names reflects the national and ideological ambitions that are in competition with each other and attempt to gain exclusive right. This has happened several times in the Banat during the course of history. During the resettlement following the Turkish occupation, at the end of the eighteenth century with the re-establishment of the system of counties, at the end of the nineteenth century during the Hungarianisation then during the Romanian annexation, during the organisation of communist Romania and last after the 1989 Romanian revolution. The rapid series of changes evokes the

feeling of instability and insecurity. It is worthwhile to note, however, that beside the official name material – now exclusively Romanian – there exists a Hungarian and a German name material as well, even if in a fragmentary condition. This originates back to the age of stability, to the time period of 1867-1918. Its use therefore does not only express ethnic elements but also gives the feeling of stability in the general instability, it means an alternative for the use of Romanian names and to a certain extent for the Romanian authority. (BARNA 2000a, BARNA 2000b)

Ethnic Groups, Languages and Cultures

Until 1918-1920, the annexation of the region by Romania, despite their minority in number German and Hungarian ethnicities were dominant in the Banat. These dominated local and regional administration beside the co-operating local Romanians. After the annexation to Romania, officials from Royal Romania took over the management of administration and mainly non-Romanians took over the management of administration and mainly non-Romanians took over the directing of various institutions like schools and factories. Romanian colonists were settled in near the Hungarian settlements that were not considered trustworthy. Romanian border guards were brought into the expropriated houses of Hungarian and German settlements that were in the vicinity of the new Hungarian state border. Also during the so-called land reform Romanians were settled in the lands expropriated from local landowners in order to change the ethnic relations and in order to threaten. A mentality started to spread in the Banat, very different from the previous one. Corruption and despotism poisoned everything. In the terminology of the family histories and recollections this was called "ciubuc", which was unknown to the Romanian population of the region.

Ethnic threatening manifested itself in – beside the excommunication of Hungarians and a smaller number of Hungarophile Germans – flat expropriations, Romanianising education then in an attack against churches and their institutions (orders, church schools). At the end of World War Two our region was also affected by the looting of Romanian independent troops: e.g. the still uninvestigated massacre of a large group of innocent Hungarians at Pankota/Pincota and Világos/Şiria. The Hungarians of Radna only escaped death with a stroke of luck.

Germans were devastated by their deportation to the Soviet Union, which claimed many thousands of lives and thus decimated their ethnic group. Those who managed to return home faced expropriation and forced organisation of collective farms (kolkhozes). As a result, the relatively closed society of German settlements dissolved. Beside the emigration to Germany after the war, the migration to the towns disintegrated and reduced the society of German settlements in the Banat.⁴

⁴ Compare with Erzsébet ARNOLD's and Helga JAKSA and Bertalan PUSZTAI' S works. JAKSA – PUSZTAI 2001.

The change of the emporium meant a change in the bigger community language usage. Formerly, before 1918 the language of administration was Hungarian. Although the ethnic groups were able to use their mother tongue, belonging to Hungary practically meant that Hungarian was the language of the state as well as of individual success in life. (SCHENK 1978) Although, the Banat was polyglot where the knowledge of Hungarian-German-Romanian and at places Serbian languages at a high level was quite general. The intermediary languages between different ethnic groups, dominantly Romanian, German and Hungarian as well a smaller group of Serbian, Croatian, Slovak, Czech and Bulgarian were often Hungarian and German.

This situation changed after the annexation of the region to Romania. Romanian became the state language and thus the language of administration and official communication. While in previous decades the Hungarian ethnic group tended to assimilate Germans and in smaller numbers Romanians and other ethnic groups, now the direction of linguistic adjustment and assimilation changed: everybody was assimilated and have been assimilating into the groups of Romanians. This indicates that the individual language/ethnic groups have never been isolated but they were always embedded in a greater society and show that local/micro processes always depended on global/macro processes.

This change in direction did not, however, take place without conflicts. Since behind the different languages there were and are different cultures and religions, different religious cultures and civilisations.

The Changes of Identity

Few scientific problems proved to be so long lasting and lengthily intriguing as the issue of identity. It has been the subject matter of ethnologic and sociologic researches for many years. Within the next couple of years no drop in interest is expected along the regions of the Danube, either. One reason for this is the tragic history of the nations in the Carpathian Basin in the twentieth century: changes in the political systems, collective accountabilities, excommunications, national eradications, ethnic cleansing, multiple border modifications, financial destruction because of loss of wealth, nationalization and the scattered character of the Hungarian nation. On the other hand, in connection with the accession to the EU the Hungarian nation which is an odd one out among the other nations in the Carpathian Basin has to deal with the issues, preserving, forming and re-establishing both its own and the European identity. (GODDARD–LLOBERA–SHORE 1996, 23-27)

Identity or self-knowledge is something not self-explanatory. It is not a constant invariant. It can change, modify and vary. We can also change, modify and vary our identity.

A key function of identity is to provide a positive emotional charge to its bearer in his everyday life, to provide a positive charge to the aspect, interpretation and

planning of past, present and future as well as to a positive judgement of the bearer himself and others. In general we can say that when this function is not fulfilled, identity change can take place. However, it is not certain that it will take place. The Hungarian population of the disconnected areas have all been facing some discrimination since 1920 but still only a minority opt for a complete identity change, the road of language, cultural and religious assimilation. The rest of them will feel their Hungarian identity stronger due to these discriminations. In between the two possible extreme poles we can experience a variety of individual choices.

In the process of identity change the formation of convenience searching identity is not too difficult in a multilingual area with mixed nationalities. As part of this process, a large percentage of Germans in the Banat, especially in the towns, joined the Hungarian ethnic group before World War One. After World War Two having got into a minority position similarly to Hungarians their identity became latent and situation dependent. Note that one part of the Germans in Radna consider themselves to be of Hungarian besides keeping their German identity. In practice it is manifested by their being members of both Hungarian and German social organisations.

Self-identity is layered and complex. We can entirely change even the most essential element of identity, and still the framework, the person remains the same, however, his identity will change not only in its structure but also in its content: it will be translayered.

Remembering and Remembrance

Remembrance and historical remembering are key elements and founders of individual and community identity creation. Historical remembering is a precise definition of what a community should not forget. Therefore it does not equal with history, it is a selection from history, and nevertheless its ties to the past are strong. Historical remembrance is not a spontaneous phenomenon and although it is the individual who remember of something and of somebody, remembrance is always collective. (ASSMANN 1999.)

The historical remembrance of those living in minority may be sacralised more, but at the same time it gets lighter and weaker as far as the content is concerned. The reason for this is that the communicative remembrance weakens. Following the parting of Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after World War One and following the occupation of the disconnected Hungarian lands by the Czechs, Romanians, Serbians and Austrians, the new empires' first task was to destroy the symbols (statues, memorial plaques) of the Hungarian remembrance and to exchange them with the objects of another historical remembrance. This means that they immediately changed the experiencable space, the objects of the space, which bring the historical time in sync with the

space. (BARNA 2000a, BARNA 2000b.) In the case of former minorities the historical remembrance has changed: Romanians, Slovaks, Germans learnt a different type of thinking that emphasizes contrasts instead of a history learnt and commonly experienced through many generations – a real Hungarian supremacy, which still announces cohesion. For example in the areas annexed to Romania instead of a Hungarian oriented thinking minorities learnt an adverse, hostile Romanian view. However, even this has changed in its content several times during the course of history. The great Romanian nationalist historical approach from the 1950s was overtaken by the historical materialism's Marxist ideas, which picked up a lot of chauvinistic, nationalistic tones in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ The 1989 Christmas Romanian revolution induced the fall of Marxism.

The Hungarian schools among the schools taking key roles in the process of shaping the historical remembrance were transformed – in our example region, in the Southern Hungarian Plain – into Romanian/Serbian state schools. Religious schools were abolished after 1950. The Roman Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran schools in our region were all Hungarian and German. After the nationalization of these schools only the occupant Romanian and Serbian historical view was and is allowed to be taught.

The education of history and geography in Romanian and with a Romanian view is still aimed at making the community remembrance's strong bonds to the past (time) and place (homeland) weaker and at making place for another type of approach: instead of a Hungarian, a Romanian or Serbian approach. Collective remembrance provides and draws boundaries to individual remembering: it tells who and what can be remembered of, doing so with employing what kind of cultural toolbar. Since collective remembrance in the recent centuries has been shaped increasingly by school education, the minorities are deprived of this intermediary channel, and oral traditions gain increasing importance in forming and maintaining collective historical remembrance. Counter effects are, however, the breaking up of traditional communities, and the weakening of oral traditions in general especially in the decades of the twentieth century.

Under these circumstances the significance of oral and folkloristic culture can grow in general. Minority cultures may well be called folk cultures, since showing this presents the most characteristic features of the community and the individual in the community's eyes. It presents what makes us different from others.

The Role of Religion and Churches

In the above situations the role of religion(s) and churche(s) can become more significant. In the particular Banat minority situation (Hungarian, Slovakian, Croatian, Rusyn, Bulgarian, etc.) the role of the non-Orthodox (Romanian and

⁵ About the connections between politics and nationalism in relation to communist Romania see: GILBERG 1981

Serbian) i.e. the Roman Catholic, the Calvinist and Lutheran Churches become more prominent. These latter ones with their sheer existence represent a kind of difference in the region, they represent a non-Romanian and non-Serbian Orthodox sphere: culture, faith, religious practice and a church history with a different orientation. Their church historical background, which is Western Christian links them directly to the Hungarian church(es) and church organization. This is reinforced by all the sacral spaces and memory objects of the Banat: Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, statues and pictures of Hungarian saints, the images of the Catholic Ecumenical Church's saints road crosses, public statues and Calvaries at the edge of villages.

The churches and religions do not only take part in sacralising the space but also the time. Let us remember the various church festivals, their liturgies and the events connected to the church festivals, the experienced and experience able time, the times of everyday life. Also, remember the different Gregorian and Julian calendars. I recall a German/Hungarian woman from Lipova, who prayed for her children to get married to Catholics. Nationality and language are less important for her, since they are multi-lingual. As an answer to the question why she said that this way they would celebrate Christmas and Easter only once a year and there would be no argument within the family over which religion to get more emphasis. Religious culture provides, therefore, the essence, content, base and framework of everyday culture.

These problems, however, do not appear solely on the level of the individual. They are present in the community's life, too. While – despite its secularity – in today's Hungary following Western Christianity it does not cause too much concern to celebrate big Christian church festivals. in Romania and Serbia where Orthodoxy is virtually a state religion it causes a great problem since there is a difference between the Eastern and Western Christian liturgical order and time. The identity forming role of the church and religion is stronger in the minority communities of the Banat, and the scale of religiousness – also in the sense of belonging to a church – is bigger in minority societies. It is obviously due to the fact that many other roles of religion and its structural framework i.e. the church can be activated despite all symptoms of secularization.

The distinguishing role of religion and religious culture is maintained even when language assimilation takes place and a new cultural assimilation commences. As a result of the language assimilation a greater part of Hungarians in Moldavia identify themselves neither Csángó Hungarians nor Romanians – because they are Orthodox but Catholics. (TÁNCZOS 1997.) The Hungarian Calvinist believers of Abaúj/Abov near Košice experience a strong Slovakianisation in their language. They give up their Hungarian identity in the field of language and culture but they insist on their Calvinist religion and they call themselves Reformed Slovaks. (BARNA 1997.) Many researchers consider this self-identification based on religious origin archaic and older than civil national identity. It is possible, but – as we have seen – similar scenarios can take place in our so-called post-modern era, too. In certain social situations therefore religion became/

becomes a force and factor that keeps groups together and represents a symbol for being distinguished (situational identity).

Probably, the sporadic Hungarian ethnic groups of the Southern Partium and the Banat will face a similar transformation as the “Csángós”. Further, the same will happen to the German minorities who did not move out of the region as well as to other ethnic groups. It is a certain that in the past decades Romanian language has appeared in the Roman Catholic sermons. Unlike previously, when certain ethnic/language groups had their sermons at various times, which meant that the language groups were separated from each other in time and not in language. Many people consider it right in the polyglot environment, others take it as an insult to their national identities. The reasons for a mixing of languages may be found in mixed marriages and language assimilation, to a lesser degree, the Romanian tongue Greek Catholics living sporadically in the countryside and also the conversion from Orthodox to Catholic religion.

In the current situation, however, the Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism are religions and churches bearing strong national features and characters. Until the 1990s the Catholic church in the Banat comprised mostly German characters, now it is Hungarian. (LOTZ 1984.) Note, that in the Banat, in The Southern Partium not only the Calvinist Church but also the Lutheran Church are considered Hungarian churches while the Roman Catholic Church is considered Hungarian and German.

The Significance of the Shrine of Mariaradna

During the study of the votive pictures as well as the ethnic development it was important to learn what the significance of the shrine of Radna, the pilgrimage Radna and the picture gallery of Radna had in creating the identity within the role of the Catholic religion and church.

We cannot emphasise enough how important Radna is in the shaping of the experienced everyday Catholicism and folk religious practice. Radna with its miraculous picture of the Scapular Blessed Virgin – beside Szeged – is a shrine with a large catchment area in the Great Plain today divided among three countries. Radna is the sacral centre of a large area’s Catholicism. (BÁLINT – BARNA 1994, ROOS 1998.)

Visiting Radna is a symbolic expression and confession of Catholics belonging together as well as a sign of the unity of the sacral area. According to Sándor Bálint, Radna in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “would be a symbol for Catholicism between Islam and Orthodox religions... Its cultic spell has bound the Hungarian, German, Bunievac, Bulgarian, Romanian and Tót (= Slovak) people of the Great Plain and Hungary (BÁLINT 1944, 49-50.) It cannot have been just by mistake that after the Romanian occupation the Romanian authorities prevented pilgrimages to Radna from happening. Not only the processions

from the curtailed Hungary stopped but also the Banat Hungarians and Germans from Serbia stayed away. The motherland dioceses tried to fill or counterbalance this void by getting the Hungarian parts of Radna's catchment area to organize the "Radna procession" in Szeged in the 1920s.⁶ The Hungarian pilgrimages by now have been reduced to occasional frequency.

Until Word War One Radna was the largest pilgrimage place of the great southern-eastern Hungarian region bordered by Zenta/Senta – Kecskemét – Szolnok – Nagyvárad/Oradea – Déva/Deva – Fehértemplom/Bela Crkva, and now it is the biggest shrine in Western Romania. The characteristic feature of the place is the still existing tradition of votive picture donation that has accelerated in the third quarter of the twentieth century. The scale of this is illustrated by the 1711 pictures hanging on the corridor walls of Radna's shrine church. The pictures indicate that many of the pilgrims visiting the church felt and still feel that their prayers and pleas are listened to here, and with Mary's intercession God has helped them in their troubles and illnesses. They show their gratitude with a picture or a marble plaque. The votive picture gallery thus is continuously growing, changing and expanding.⁷

In our research we did not only endeavor to conduct a quantitative account and inventory of the votive pictures of the gallery but through finding the available donators and conducting interviews with them we also uncovered the motives behind the picture donations and picture preparation. The pictures and their donation showed the cultural pattern, and exhibited the forms of individual piety (worshipping a saint or Mary), the practical details of the act, the relation to Radna and furthermore the later relation to the donated picture. We learnt that the picture donation and its background are closely attached to the intimate sphere of religiousness but at the same time they are special forms of public religion confession, a sacral communication. The few picture painters who were found described the circumstances of the orders and the act of painting. With each interview we tried to place the act of the picture donation into the framework of a broader life story in order to be able to decide to what extent the donators consider the picture donation an expression of ethnicity or religious identity.⁸

These donations all prove that the motives behind the purchase and donation of these votive pictures/objects are the same: the individual in a crisis situation can only hope for help from the transcendent world (from God, Mary, saints and angels). He has tried and exhausted all worldly help sources: physicians, authorities, and fellow people's empathy. The problems about which these people plea to the help of Virgin Mother of Radna – let us no forget that Mary is "advocate nostra" i.e. our heavenly solicitor, who just as a good solicitor does not only mediate in ours case, but also "takes action" for us – were mainly illnesses, accident

6 These document, written and oral memories should be important to be collected, analysed and interpreted especially for our use. Compare: ifj. LELE 2000.

7 The quantitative analysis of this collection can be found in our volume's study written by Zsuzsánna Péter and Erika Vass. PÉTER – VASS 2001.

8 Helga Jaksa and Bertalan Pusztai's study in this volume provides the content analysis of the interviews. JAKSA – PUSZTAI 2001.

or problems and conflicts of their individual life that seemed to be impossible to solve. These problems did not, however, originate only from family life conflicts, but they also reflect the past decades' social history, too: the war, the lives of the Germans taken to the Soviet Union, the Germans' search for stability who were forced to or voluntarily emigrated to Germany, the helplessness and vulnerability of officials who were tried innocent against the corrupt authorities and the almost last cry for help of the youngster who could not or hardly managed to be accepted at the university. Some interviews contained elements of opposition against the Romanian communist/atheist authorities, the fear from them, the expandability to them and the idea of juxtaposing religion and power. These motives prove that for many people in many situations Radna and the Virgin Mother of Radna, the Catholic religion and faith meant security and the last resort.

The old and young monks of the Radna Franciscan cloister accept and tolerate the religious practice of picture donation. In the past years though there seems to be changes taking place in the new ecclesiarch's acceptance of the above. Behind the acceptance may lie not only a more tolerant Franciscan way of thinking but also the realization of the fact that the several hundred pictures in the picture gallery of Radna are all tangible symbols of relying on God, they acknowledge the "last resort" character and role of faith, religion and the church. This was obviously proven by the sharp increase in the number of picture donations in the times of communism. In front of the visitors the large number of pictures enforce and propagate the effectiveness and popularity of the shrine of Radna.

The traditions of picture donations therefore live on in Radna. Its intensity during the past 150 years was changeable. In its outer form the tradition is transformed according to the region's ethnic changes. During the course of the decades the iconographical composition of the pictures has changed and the language of the masses has also changed. The function of the pictures, however, remained unchanged: they always recall past memories to appear in the present, i.e. the picture makes the past event become present tense. With help of the pictures narrative remembrance is repeated: it is recalled, restructured, it fades or becomes more vivid. The individuality/particularity of the narratives fade while the general character demonstrating the everlasting nature and presence of divine help through Mary and the saints' intermediary actions become more prominent. The pictures' and objects' identificational and ethnic identity expressing character weakens or disappears. The gallery's pictures will become just sign of the numinosum's intervention down here. Although their interpretation becomes increasingly difficult this way, they are still living signs and amplifiers of a peculiar Catholic religious practice. The pictures keep a Western Christian religious practice as well as a Central European, Hungarian/German historical remembrance alive. These are the roots of the difficulties of the gallery's survival and the clashes with the Orthodoxy and the Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Balkan civilization.

The experiences gained from the Banat fieldwork demonstrate that religion and/or the church and belonging to a church can be the last resort for people in the twentieth century's permanent unstable situation. It can be a community that provides stability, a background land that can mean home and the homeland in a broader sense.

It is well illustrated by the fact that the emigrant Germans in their old/new homeland, in today's Germany form and (reconstruct) the sacral space structure that reminds them of their old home thus they duplicate the saint place of their old homeland i.e. Radna.⁹ The old family house, the cemeteries conserving the ancestors' graves and Radna symbolise the old homeland. The Germans visiting home to see their old houses they grew up in, they were born in all occupied by strangers (Romanians), they visit the parish-church, the cemetery with their ancestors grave and Radna, the pilgrimage place of their homeland that they left behind. They often brought pictures and photos of their new home in Germany to the Radna picture gallery thus symbolically unifying the old and new homeland on a sacral level. On the Radna cloister corridor they often look at the picture they donated again, they view the picture gallery and remember so this way they help getting detached spiritually as well.

In the Atmosphere of Instability

Why and how did religion and its organisational/social framework that represents religion i.e. church achieve such a distinguished role?

After the annexation of the region to Romania, the Romanian state power withheld the non-Orthodox churches' operational licences and this way the church leaders and followers were exposed to the arbitrariness of the new power's officials. On the one hand, the aim of the authority was to reduce and break the national character and economic power of the non-Romanian churches and on the other, to strengthen Orthodoxy. Therefore they simultaneously supported Romanian Orthodoxy thus fostering religious assimilation.

In public squares, schools and in the public life Romanian language became more and more compulsory and Romanian nationality gained dominance. In this situation experiencing and expressing ethnic origins i.e. using and applying the national language and culture in a community in public were and still are limited to churches. It is especially valid for the usage of the mother tongue since outside the walls and framework of the church the individual faces a world dominated by another language so he is forced to use the same language, too.

⁹ This kind of duplication is not a rare and new phenomenon. Practically, the same thing happened in the Middle Age after the Islam's conquering of the Holy Land: with the use of relics, the holy places of Palestine were re-established in Europe i.e. they were duplicated. A similar process can be observed in the case of the cults forming around icon copies.

It is worthwhile to note, that in parallel with the social processes the dominant language penetrates the sacral sphere that is defined by other languages. The reason for this lies partly in mixed marriages, partly in language assimilation and partly in the churches' missionary work. Previously the same happened to the Hungarian and after 1920 the Romanian language.

The basic situation is of course that the ethnic groups living in the region are strongly tied Christian denominations and churches, which gives an ethnic touch to their religious practice and church affiliation. Romanians are mostly Orthodox, few of them are of Greek Catholic religion (this latter is true again only since after the 1989 Christmas changes as in 1948 the Greek Catholic church was forcedly unified with the Orthodox church and was banned). The majority of Hungarians are Roman Catholics, few of them are of Calvinist religion while in the towns there are Lutherans, Germans are Roman Catholic and Lutherans, Bulgarians, Crassovans (=Croatians) and Slovaks are Roman Catholics but there are some Lutherans to be found among them.

In the unstable atmosphere created by the twentieth century's involuntary changes when state and administrative borders, education, political party structure, the circle of civil organisations, the names of human environment and the assessment of ethnic groups either in censuses¹⁰ or because of the ideological environment changed several times, the churches meant stability despite all the restrictions in connection with their operation. The teachings of the churches remained unchanged, most often when they switched the language of liturgy (it was Latin until the end of the 1960s in the case of Roman Catholics) or when switching to a national language liturgy, the co-existing ethnic groups' language was respected as opposed to in any other field of life. When we look at Roman Catholicism, the dominance of Romanian is striking to the detriment of other languages. In practice, however, it still means a multilingual religious practice. While, in the past this multilingualism in the church meant that different languages were used in time and space (e.g. the different language groups had their masses at different times) today language usages are not distinguished but mixed and mingled. In given conditions this causes conflict not only within the dioceses but it serves as one channel of introducing Romanian into the church to the detriment of Hungarian and German as well as the other languages and furthermore it is also an influencing tool. Yet, up to today the church has been the only public space where minority languages have their functions.

The multilingualism present in sermons, in religious education, in essence within the frameworks of the church clearly indicates the conquest of the Romanian language. An additional reason for this is that priests from the dominantly Romanian diocese of Jászvásár/Iaş arrived here because of the few church positions in the diocese, these priests, although they acquire an elementary level of German and Hungarian, in their religious teachings as well as in their everyday

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communication speak Romanian, which they feel more comfortable to use and is understood by everybody.

Despite the growing dominance of the Romanian language the language usage of the Catholic and Protestant churches and the objects of the churches are still more closely connected to the Hungarian and German cultures. The picture and statue captions are in Hungarian and German, however, the language used not on the noticeboards i.e. the language in practice shows the upsurge of the use of Romania.

The church in the Banat, however, became an ethnic symbol and has remained the same ever since. Preserving and maintaining it or taking part in these actions for long has meant preserving and maintaining the mother tongue and the ethnic culture.

The Orthodox Romanians who settled in or are nowadays settling in do not everywhere repossess the Roman Catholic churches that have become empty after the emigration but in many places they erect buildings with domes in Byzantine style or new churches. The old Orthodox churches were built entirely in the various styles of the Western European Latin Christianity. In the Banat these churches are mainly in late Baroque and Classical style. Their appearance is the same as that of Roman Catholic or Protestant (Calvinist and Lutheran) churches. The new stream of erecting churches with domes also means that the sacral land is being transformed depending on the religious denomination, the conquest of a new mentality and a new religious culture. In order to exhibit their presence in the space the Romanians moving in have to build their churches that alien to the historical land. The old and the new Orthodox churches at the same time are capable of symbolically showing the cultural and civilizational differences of the trueborn and the newcomer Romanians. The immigrant Romanians only establish horizontal relationships that lack local and socially bound vertical relations.

Religion in this aspect can be regarded as a kind of last resort. In different public spaces and within different frameworks the language and ethnic culture can only be hiding latent or suppressed as the "vorbiț româneste" ('speak Romanian') notices warned. But how long can religion preserve this role in the process of secularisation?

The Stability of Religion – From the Equilibrium of Diversity to the "Equilibrium" of Homogeneity

One of the lessons to be learnt from the above situation analysis is that in the area that 80 years ago was divided and annexed between Serbia and Romania new social developments started to take place. These changes are characterised by instability. The new states could not integrate the Banat on the foundations of the previously established system of values and interests. This system was grounded on a Western Christianity civil society. The countryside previously showing different types of social background for centuries – which was unique even within

the Hungarian state framework – could and can only be directed according to the centralising government plans if a permanent feeling of instability is created and sustained. The constant administrative modifications¹¹ served the same purpose similarly to the changes in all fields of life. The impact of instability is that it makes the individual and the civil community insecure, it makes planning for the future unpredictable and this way both the individual and the community become vulnerable. This psychological situation creates the feeling of indifference. In a social atmosphere like this the individual becomes easily manipulated. The power's interest and aim is to maintain and draw advantage of this instability and to eradicate diversity.

The Western Christian religions and churches in this situation create stability for the individual: they provide a stable base among all the changes and instability. These religions differ from the Orthodoxy so their roots are different and when they are connected with ethnic groups they assure ethnic identity. Therefore they sustain national, religious and language diversity. This way their interests are against the state power's intentions to keep equilibrium of homogeneity. If the individual is still longing for stability and predictability he will search for and find special ways to achieve these: 1) he will assimilate into the majority ethnic/language/religious/cultural group that provides stability; 2) he will emigrate i.e. he will search for stability in his own majority national/language/group 3) he will create a transcendent stability in his faith, religion and within the frameworks of his church.¹²

Those large-scale changes that characterise the Banat in the twentieth century and especially at the end of the century allow for all three possibilities or choices. At the same time these changes are true reflections of the internal dissemination of a once developed and tolerant region. Romania's behaviour after 1920 is that of a typical colonist. The new state took the "native's" wealth away (houses, land, factories), it depossessed their education and they have been restricting their churches even today. On the other side they introduced their own language, exclusively in which their own history is taught and they support their own ethnic/state religion. The "natives" are second-rate citizens who can only choose one of the above-mentioned ways in order to create their individual and community stability. If Romania once integrates the Banat, too, they can only do so to the land, since the society that established and for two centuries has sustained and operated the unique culture of the Banat has virtually disappeared: Germans and many Hungarians emigrated and the more and more decisive majority of the local society have no local roots, were not born here, they are monolingual and monocultural and they are intolerant. One culture, that of the Germans has already died out. (BARNA-LÖNNQVIST 2000.) Will the culture of the other nationalities and ethnic groups be next?

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12 Eriksen (1993. 123-124) also considers that from the ethnic minorities' and the state power's point of view there are three possibilities: 1) assimilation; 2) accepting the inferior status; 3) separation. ERIKSEN 1993. 123-124.

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