

BOOK REVIEW

**Marius Lazăr, (2023). Teoria blocului de gheață. Explorări în
sociologia relațiilor interetnice [*Ice Block Theory. Explorations in the Sociology of Interethnic Relations*],
Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca**

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Casa Cărții de Știință, a well-known publishing house from Cluj Napoca (founded in 1992) publishes a new volume by the renowned sociologist Marius Lazăr, volume with the surprising title: *The Ice Block Theory* (metaphorical suggestion related to the reaction of minorities towards dominant groups between identity conservatism and openness relations towards the majority). It is a series of studies by the author gathered over twenty years of research on interethnic relations (focusing mainly on Romanian-Hungarian relations in Transylvania) conducted through the *Research Center of Interethnic Relations - CCRIT, Institute for the Study of National Minorities Problems - ISPMN, Resource Center for Ethnocultural Diversity - CRDE, Metro Media Transilvania-MMT* etc.

The first part of the volume comes with typological clarifications (minorities grouped into three categories: Hungarians, Roma, and small minorities) but also historical. Thus, in the Old Kingdom the state was manifestly monoethnic, observes the author and after 1918 Romania became multiethnic. Through the signed international treaties, which guaranteed the borders of Greater Romania, the task of protecting national minorities was enshrined, even in conditions of ideological or nationalist slippages. After 1930, minorities were reduced quantitatively (following World War II, deportations, or emigration), the only minority with a significant increase being the Roma. Today, several 19 minorities are recognized in Romania, and their parliamentary representation is a reality (except for UDMR, all other parties and cultural associations have one parliamentary mandate). Marius Lazar analyses majority-minority political relations, highlighting certain tendencies of the current political scene, from the tendency to incorporate minority-elected representatives to the positive external image given by the political representation of minorities. A remarkable

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contribution of the author is to clarify the evolution of the concept of *minority* following the logic of overlapping three systems: the first coming from the Versailles peace treaty of 1919 (along with the state reconfigurations the protection of minorities was proposed, as I mentioned), the second coming from the Soviet model (with a declarative equalization of opportunities but with the „freezing of potential conflicts” to reactivate them if needed) and the third model - the one imposed by the EU (which enshrines a partial delegitimization of the principles of national sovereignty concerning minorities). The author notes that these three perspectives do not contribute fairly to the sociological definition of minority, just as the mere statistical mention of census data is not enough. So is the situation of various hegemonically imposed typologies. That is why the author proposes a review of anthropological perspectives, but also of political sociology regarding the evolution of the notion of *minority* (often associated with that of *ethnicity* – a concept difficult to define, as seen in *the CCRIT Eurobarometer* conducted in 2000). The first approach is the culturalist one, followed by a political approach. That said, the author details an extended definition of ethnicity in a subchapter distinguished by the quality of sociological reflection (in the good Bourdieusian tradition). Remarkable is M. Lazar's analysis regarding the „French” from Banat (starting from a study of Smaranda Vultur) settled/displaced since the 1700s in Tomnatic commune (Timiș county), who after decades were assimilated with the Swabians or Hungarians, and were going to ask for repatriation after World War II. The example given by Marius Lazar allows him to bring into discussion the sociological perspective of ethnicity „as modus operandi” by using the concepts of *habitus*, *social or symbolic capital* (P. Bourdieu) but also the notion of homophily (coming from social network theory). Regarding the historical evolution of minorities, the author notes that they are subject to two contradictory phenomena: a continuous process of homogenization (imposed by majority pressure) accompanied by a decrease in demographic capital and a process of „solidification” ensured internally by all instances that support the cultural reproduction of ethnic groups. The 'ice block' model appears in this analysis: dissipation and erosion on the outside versus the continuous strengthening of a hard core on the inside.

An example of these extremely complex relationships is found by the author in the case of (mixed) marriages as the main vehicle of ethnic and identity reproduction (referring to the declared ethnicity of descendants). Marius Lazar recalls situations in which the declared lineage is rather inclined towards the dominant group (as an expression of modernity and/or increasing the chances of upward social mobility). In this context, ethnocentrism is not circumvented but only tempered: there are, says the author, *pure ethnic groups* only in the discourse of certain ideologies ready to justify various forms of domination.

A second chapter (written in collaboration with Istvan Horvath) is dedicated to interethnic sources of conflicts/tensions in Transylvania with a starting point in the elections that took place in 1996. The author makes a concise analysis of Romania before and after the Revolution to identify the sources of conflicts often knowingly provoked at the micro or macro social level. The analysis

of the evolution of social tensions from the perspective of capital theory proves very opportune here (see the idea that the new elite, the heiress of the former communist elite, actually converted *relational capital* into private *economic capital*). As for the reform of local administrations in the post-revolution period, this was done through a sinuous itinerary dictated by the redefinition of central vs. local relations to which were added the interethnic tensions (re)appeared. As far as political competition is concerned, the author notes the similarities of voting/political orientation according to the ethnic map of Transylvania. An in-depth factorial analysis applied to a sample from the municipality of Cluj brings a series of important nuances by identifying the contribution of four variables in social differentiation worthy of consideration in any profile analysis: urban/rural origin, parents' studies, level of social integration and standard of living. Another argument taken into account by the author was the weight of UDMR (The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) in the Transylvanian counties (a fact with significant influence on the vote in the presidential elections of that year) but also the rural/urban differences (which blurred the ethnic divergences). The same blurring has been visible in interviews with local elected officials: a certain sense of collectivity makes threats usually come from outside, while internal ethnic relations are described as harmonious. If certain tensions arise, it would rather be due to the intrusion of those from the centre into the local administration (through its representatives – the communal secretaries).

The third chapter of the paper extends a research conducted by the author and a group of sociologist colleagues in the year 2000 in Harghita and Covasna counties with the purpose indicated in the title, to identify „conflicting identities and antagonistic roles” in minority-majority relations. The survey included a sample of 1282 respondents representative of the population in both counties. The author draws attention to the tendency to read *Szeklerland* as an exotic space characterized by distorted information or uncontrollable urban legends. To overcome these limitations, the author recommends direct field observation as well as avoidance of *double insider syndrome* (Naumovici, 1999) to ensure objectivity and neutrality of the researcher. Marius Lazăr reviews the establishment and evolution of *Szeklerland* (from ancient tribal descent to the Hungarian Autonomous Region) highlighting the sinuous interethnic relations between Romanians and Hungarians (an example would be the double exclusion at the discursive level: „the majority want to implement a Romanian colonization”, the minorities believe vs. „the Romanians are expelled from the two counties”, the majority believe etc.). The interviews conducted by the research team brought several additional clarifications and relativized to a large extent „perceived discrimination”. Analysis of the interviews revealed difficulties with linguistic adaptation, political socialization, or perceptions of the historical past and religious oppression. However, discrimination is more intensely invoked in urban areas, more intensely in Covasna than in Harghita, more intensely where Hungarians are dominant, more intensely even among those who declare that they know Hungarian at a satisfactory level etc. An important finding was that interethnic tensions are directly related to the

ethno-demographic structure of localities in the sense that „the declared adversity towards the representatives of the competing group is lower in the areas where the two groups coexist only where the population is perfectly homogeneous” (p. 115). This is possible because a social process of *tolerance building* intervenes and acts as a control in the face of potential conflict. This explains why interethnic conflicts exist on a declarative level, but not in real life. Another important aspect concerns the majority's strategy of considering themselves as minorities and each other. Finally, one of the many conclusions drawn by the author can be mentioned here: the majority-minority role-playing game is variable depending on the competitors' frame of reference. In this context, the conflict avoidance strategies are „complex role-playing games, double strategies, combined modes of survival and often masks”.

Chapter four entitled *Social Semantics and Ethnicity* aims to identify a typology of *discursive identity modes*. The author proceeds to a secondary analysis of the data collected in the research from 1997-2008 focused on the topic of *ethnicity*, and the main technique was factorial analysis / principal components analysis. As is well known, such an analysis aims to simplify a large number of variables to a small number of factors designed to synthesize distinct types of attitudes. Two large groups of variables entered the analysis: the first consisting of socio-demographic and cultural characteristics (likely to influence attitudinal variations) and the second group consisting of attitudinal variables grouped according to 14 thematic areas. Finally, the author identified eight factors (actually eight distinct attitudinal types): *orientation towards the political right, orientation towards UDMR, critical loyalism, Roma activism, xenophobia and nationalist radicalism, minority radical loyalism, liberalism and moderate Hungarianophobic liberalism*, each of the attitudes being attributed to well-defined social groups/strata by socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics. In the end, the author draws attention to the fact that the methodology used to explain ethnocentrism has facilitated the identification of some „ideal types” that only reveal a very complex sociocultural reality influenced by how „ethnocentric glasses” are used: by denying the relevance of ethnicity by the majority or by denying objective social relations by the minority.

Chapter five is an analysis of *the local press and the interethnic climate*. Marius Lazar resumes a series of classic clarifications regarding the research of media consumption and the impact of information starting from P. Lazarsfeld or R. Merton. The purpose of such research is to understand the importance of local media in the communication structure of Transylvanian ethnicities. The author makes a series of subtle demarcations between the central press, the regional press, and the local press in Romanian/Hungarian, especially given that several central press agencies have set up local branches. The *content analysis* research took place in March-May 1999 with an area covering 13 Transylvanian counties following 57 publications, the research goals being listed from the start: thematic coverage of the respective publications, attitudes of publications in the space of political opinions in Romania and attitudes regarding minorities and interethnic. The

content analysis used four types of tools: description according to the editorial box, first-page sheet, editorial evaluative sheet, *ethnic* and *regional* evaluative sheet. The evaluative analyses were accompanied by a five-step attitude scale: from *very positive* to *very negative*. After laborious thematic and attitudinal analyses, the author calculated, as appropriate, *the dominant attitude index* (Ia). Each publication was thus characterized by themes and editorial evaluations. The author was thus able to ascertain the significant differences between publications in Romanian and those in Hungarian, taking into account their origin (former publications governed by PCR [the Romanian Communist Party] vs. new publications) or addressability area (local, regional, central). Regarding the problems of the Hungarian community, the Romanian-language press was generally critical, while the Hungarian-language press tended towards neutrality. In fact, 41.3% of the Romanian-language press have an unfavourable or very unfavourable attitude towards Hungarians. Such percentages were higher in the local press and much more weighted in the central press. Making a typology of attitudes towards Hungarians, the author differentiates between radical and moderate attitudes. Among the radical ones, the unfavourable attitude came from Romanian/local/former PCR publications, while the favourable attitudes came from Hungarian/local/new publications after the Revolution (1989). Overall, Marius Lazar observes that 'ethnic' attitudes must also be seen in relation to specific transformations of the Romanian press in the new period of democratic opening.

The second part of this paper is entitled *Reactions* and shows us another face of Marius Lazar: the sociologist is also a man of the city, which is why he reacts to topics of public interest, from editorial appearances to various artistic events. These are events that can benefit from clarification through the prism of a rich tradition of sociological research on ethnicity. Thus, the author's contributions were briefly the following: notes on urban Cluj and the nationalist administration of sad memory; reflections starting from an exhibition of photographs signed by „Duo van der Mixt” (in fact Mihai Pop and Ciprian Rusu artists); a foreword to the Romanian version of the volume signed by R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, J. Fox and L. Grancea (2006). *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, Oxford; a very critical comment on a volume signed by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (1999). *Subjective Transylvania*, Humanitas; a critical but well-reasoned review of Dan David's volume (2015), *The Psychology of the Romanian People*, Polirom; a small essay on *Conflicts, stereotypes and ethnic prejudices* and finally a commentary on a show entitled *Double Bind* played in 2015 at the Astra Film Fest Festival in Sibiu. All these contributions are directly related to the research detailed in the first part of the book and come to complete a very complex vision of the social reality that we see in Marius Lazăr, a sociologist with a sinuous speech reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's style, but also a brilliant methodologist who builds his arguments mainly on the statistical interpretation of data with a starting point in sociological field observation.