

ANCESTRY AND NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN ROMANIA

HORAȚIU RUSU¹

Abstract

This paper examines the relation between the ethnic origin and the strength of national identification, as emotional attachment to Romania. Despite there are many nationalism studies, not enough are exploring empirical data while questioning ethno-nationalist conceptions in and about Romania. Considering the primordialist perspectives, the roots of the nation are of ethnic origin, therefore a stronger relation should be expected between those of Romanian ethnic background and their national identifications, as compared to national identifications of people that ascribe a different or mixed ethnic origin. By running a multivariate analysis on the Romanian ESS9 wave, the article finds clues of equal degrees of identification with Romania among all these categories of people. Results do not deny connections between ancestry and national identification. The findings rather point out that in terms of emotional attachment, Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, and other citizens declaring a different common ancestry for all ancestors or a mixed ancestry, have similar levels of identification with the country.

Key words: national identification, primordial attachments, ancestry, European Social Survey, Romania

Résumé

Cet article examine la relation entre l'origine ethnique et la force de l'identification nationale, en tant qu'attachement émotionnel à la Roumanie. Bien qu'il existe de nombreuses études sur le nationalisme, elles n'explorent pas suffisamment les données empiriques tout en remettant en question les conceptions ethno-nationalistes en Roumanie et à propos de celle-ci. Considérant les perspectives primordialistes, les racines de la nation sont d'origine ethnique, donc une relation plus forte devrait être attendue entre ceux d'origine ethnique roumaine et leurs identifications nationales, par rapport aux identifications nationales des personnes qui attribuent une ethnie différente ou mixte. En effectuant une analyse multivariée sur la vague roumaine ESS9, l'article trouve des indices d'un degré égal d'identification avec la Roumanie parmi toutes ces catégories de personnes. Les résultats ne nient pas les liens entre l'ascendance et l'identification nationale. Les résultats soulignent plutôt qu'en termes d'attachement émotionnel, les Roumains, les Hongrois, les Roms et les autres citoyens déclarant une ascendance commune différente pour tous les ancêtres ou une ascendance mixte, ont des niveaux d'identification similaires avec le pays.

Mots-clés: identification nationale, attachements primordiaux, ascendance, European Social Survey, Roumanie

¹ Professor of Sociology at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu & ICCV, Romanian Academy of Sciences e-mail: horatiu.rusu@ulbsibiu.ro

Rezumat

Lucrarea analizează relația dintre originea etnică și intensitatea identificării naționale măsurată ca atașament emoțional față de România. Cu toate că există multe studii dedicate identificării naționale, nu sunt suficiente cele bazate pe date empirice. Cele care să chestioneze concepția etno-naționalistă. Conform acesteia, de vreme ce rădăcinile unei națiuni sunt de tip etnic, cei cu background etnic românesc ar trebui să se identifice mai puternic decât ceilalți cu România. Lucrarea de față investighează această posibilă relație cu ajutorul tehnicilor de analiză multivariată pe datele ESS9 din România. Rezultatele indică lipsa unor diferențe semnificative în ceea ce privește identificarea României, în raport cu originea strămoșească pe care și-o asumă respondenții. Aceste rezultate nu sugerează însă că între originea etnică și identificarea națională nu sunt legături. Ele doar spun că în termeni de atașament emoțional, toți cetățenii, indiferent de originea etnică asumată, au un nivel similar de identificare cu România.

Cuvinte cheie: identificare națională, atașamente primordiale, ascendență, European Social Survey, România

1. Introduction

When I have started to work at this paper, a thought, shared to me by someone with whom I was discussing about current developments in our society, came into my mind. I quote: "I have discussed with some friends of mine today about the political crisis... you know there are not Romanian ethnics... unfortunately very few of them remained in our country... but you know what... they are more Romanian than many Romanians you might know, or you see on TV these days" (M, 67, retired). The idea made me wonder if that was just a personal view or it finds support in large-scale empirical data.

This article examines, drawing on ESS Round 9 Romanian data, whether the ethnic background is related to the variations in the strength of national identification, measured as emotional attachment. The strength of national identification, viewed as emotional attachment, in relation with the ethnic background. A massive body of literature discussing Romanians' identity from various facets exists (e.g. Rusu & Bălașoiu, 2003; Schifirneț, 2009; Boari, Gherghina, & Murea, 2010; Bottyan & Bălțătescu, 2016;). Analyses based on survey data are still scarce. The paper fills this gap and adds to the empirical dimension of the research on national identity in Romania and on its relationship with the ethnic background understood as individuals' declared ancestry. Multivariate analysis techniques are employed. Results constitute departure points for a thorough discussion of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical reasons of the findings of this paper. These results point toward undifferentiated of emotional identifications with Romania, no matter of the ethnic background of its citizens.

ESS9 data, collected in Romania between November 2019 and February 2020, allow to empirically explore one of the main discussion topics of the national identities' theories: the emotional attachment conceptions. Leaving aside the distinction between patriotism and nationalism (see Schatz, Staub, & Lavine,

1999; Blank & Schmidt, 2003), I will consider the emotional attachment with the country as a dimension of national identification.

Different affective or emotional, and cognitive or rational nuances of the identification with the nation exist in theories, irrespective whether one discusses about primordial versus instrumental ethnicities or about the ethnic versus civic perspectives of the nation. The next section of the paper is introducing these perspectives emphasizing the conceptions that express the idea of primordial attachments and their connected factors underpinning national identity. It is followed by a section presenting the data used and methodology. Then, making use of the most recent European Social Survey data collected in Romania, I am testing for the covariates of the intensity of the emotional attachment, with a special attention given to the self-ascribed ethnic background. A discussion of the findings concludes the paper.

2. Primordial attachments, ethnic and civic views of nation

Nations are conceived in many ways. The distinction made by Kohn (1965) between ethnic and civic nations is probably the most widespread. The first conceive the nation as an ethnic community, an ethno-nation, while the latter conceives the nation as a civic, political community. The ethnic definitions of the nation relate to primordial conceptions of communities, while the civic perspectives of the nation are connected to instrumental conceptions of community belonging.

At least two aspects are relevant for this paper. First, there is the significance of the primordial ties and their connection with the ethnic definition of a nation. Second, the different relationship between nations and states that ethnic and civic perspectives bring. I will introduce them in the reverse order.

State vs. nation shapes first approach in focus. On one hand, from an ethno-nationalist view, a nation is an expression of an ethnic group. It is grounded on a common ancestry, territory of origin and residence and a community of language and habits and it is perceived as a part of the natural order of the world. States are an accomplishment of the nations in terms of cultural, political, economic, and legal terms. From such a perspective a nation creates a state. On the other hand, modern states, are embodiments of common legal, political, fiscal, economic, educational and security systems that are enforced in a distinctive territory where different populations may live. They are results of modernising forces that culminate in the XIX century in Europe. From this perspective, states, as political and administrative units that have sovereignty over a territory and its inhabitants, create nations. The common national identity is rather a matter of rationality, civic ties, and a central system of social and cultural values. The relation between the two conceptions of the nation (e.g., Smith, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1990; Gellner, 1983) is much debated and there is no need to develop it more here. to the paper, the relevant idea states that explicit biunivocal relations exists between nations and states or countries.

Significance of primordial attachment is of even higher interest. The ethnic conceptions of nations integrate views of the primordial ties that are extended from the primary group level to the community level. The primordial conceptions underpin the idea of the natural, ancestral roots of the ethnic groups and nations (Rusu, 2008; Rusu, 2009). An emphasis of the affective or emotional dimension of the identification with the primordial elements (e.g., biological connections, common territory of origin or residence) is accompanying that idea. I will exemplify these conceptions referring to Shils (1957) and Geertz (1973) who are introducing the concepts of primordial elements and primordial attachments.

Shils is credited for introducing the idea of primordial affinities in his endeavour to explain the “bonds which hold a large-scale society together” (1957, p. 131). Attempting to develop his contribution to the social action theory, Shils (1957) pays attention to other attachments than those to the central value system of society. These are attachments to the some “significant relational qualities” or “proprieties” of the persons that are considered *primordial qualities* of the organisms. They are “proprieties of the organisms in relationship to the environment and unconnected with the social structure” namely “biological relatedness and territorial location” (Shils, 1957: 139-142). “The attachment to another member of one’s kinship it is not just a function of interaction [...] it is because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood” (Shils, 1957:142). The ethos of primary group is thus not only an effect of interaction, coercion, or interest but also a product of attachment derived from the beliefs in the primordial qualities attributed the others. Geertz (1973) extends Shils’ (1957) definition of the primordial elements, by adding the cultural dimension. To him, a primordial attachment is one that “stems from [...] the assumed <givens> of social existence” (Geertz, 1973, p. 259) and comprises cultural elements beyond the territorial and blood ties. Ones’ identity is the immediate consequence of the ineffable, unaccountable absolute importance attributed to the tie of blood, language or custom. But the primordial attachments are also invoked and recreated at the political, ideological level to legitimate authority and underline national unity (Geertz, 1973).

This section may be concluded here considering that an investigation of the emotional attachments to a country might reveal on one hand the prevalence of the primordialist views of the nation in a population and, on the other hand, the relations between a state and a nation.

3. Data and methodology

The main objective of the paper aims at testing the covariates of the intensity of the emotional attachment with the country, with a special focus on the ethnic background of the respondents. The main question pursued in this paper is: “Are there significant differences in the strength of national identifications of the Romanian citizen in respect to their declared ancestry?” If one considers the primordialist conceptions, since the roots of the nation are of ethnic origin, especially when referring to Eastern European nations Kohn (1965),

a stronger relation might be expected between those ascribing themselves a Romanian ethnic background and their national identifications, than between the national identifications of the people that ascribe themselves a different or mixed ethnic origin (H1). A similar relation is expected in what concerns the language (H2).

A stepwise technique is used. The analytical model is built on ESS data round 9 from Romania. Data are weighted with the provided weights in the ESS9ROe01 release. The method employed to analyse data is linear regression, using STATA 13.

The strength of national identification is measured on a scale from 0 to 10 as an answer to the question “How emotionally attached do you feel to Romania?” where “0” means “Not at all emotionally attached” and “10” means “Very emotionally attached”. Thus, higher scores reflect stronger attachment to the country.

The main independent variable of interest is the ethnic background. In Romania, according to official statistics, there are about 89% Romanian ethnics, 6% Hungarians, 2% Roma, while among the remaining, there are more than 18 ethnicities, each counting for less than 1% out of total population. ESS captures ethnicity thorough two items, measuring respondents’ declared ancestry. Each question requires that people choose one ancestry that best applies to them. In the analyses, answers are combined so that identical or different ancestries were captured in an index. The index (eth01) has the following four categories: respondents declaring (1) Romanian only ancestry, (2) Hungarian only ancestry, (3) only one ancestry, other than Romanian or Hungarian (i.e., Roma, German, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Jewish) (4) respondents declaring mixed ancestries (i.e., people declaring a combination of ancestries). Observations recorded, simultaneously, at both ancestry questions, as ‘not classifiable’ are not included in the construction of this index (17 cases).

To verify that such a categorisation is not biased by the composition of the mixed category (that includes, besides other combinations, any combination of a declared Romanian ancestry with other ancestry) a second index (eth02) was constructed. The second index was initially constructed so that it comprises the following categories: (1) respondents declaring Romanian only ancestry, (2) respondents declaring a combination of Romanian ancestry and other ancestry (e.g. Romanian *and* Hungarian) (3) respondents declaring another ancestry, common for all ancestors (e.g. Hungarian, Roma, German, Jew), and (4) respondents declaring a mixed ancestry (that includes combinations between all other ancestries except combinations with the Romanian one). Because the last category (4) contained only 5 cases, in the analysis it was collapsed with the previous one.

Since primordialist approaches of the nation underline the importance of language, traditions, religion and place of birth, independent variables measuring these dimensions are introduced into the model. Language is a categorical

variable measuring the first language respondents declare to speak at home. The original variable in the database was recoded so it reflects three language categories: Romanian, Hungarian and other language. Also, from an empirical point of view it makes sense to control for it, since, except the respondents having unique Hungarian background (out of which about half of the declare speaking Romanian at home) almost all the other respondents, having a combined ethnic background or other unique background, declare speaking Romanian as the first language at home.

Religiosity is measured on a scale from 0 to 10 as an answer to the question “How religious are you?” where “0” means “Not at all religious” and “10” means “Very religious”. The variable does not capture the appurtenance to a specific denomination but rather approximates the level of religiosity or individualization as an expression of importance attributed to the traditional institutions.

The importance of traditions is measured on a scale from 1 to 6 as an answer to an item part of Schwartz-values scale: “Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you: Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family” where “1” means “Very much like me” and “6” means “Not at all like me”. In the analysis the variable was recoded so that “1” means “Not at all like me” and “6” means “Very much like me”

Since the number of respondents not born in Romania is very low (11 persons), I controlled for the country of birth of their parents. To this purpose, from the original variables recording if the father or the mother of the responded was born in Romania or not, an index reflecting if both parents of the respondent were born in Romania or at least one parent was born outside Romania was created (39 persons).

Finally, I controlled for respondents’ education (measured as the number of years of education), age, residential area (using urban versus rural dichotomy) and for gender.

The cases of refusal to answer (‘I will not answer’) and indecision (‘I do not know’) were treated as missing values for all the variables included in the analysis. Respondents not holding a Romanian citizenship (3 cases) were eliminated from all the analyses. All these and the above-described indices construction leave us with minimum 1724 valid cases out of the original 1846 cases in the sample.

4. Analysis and results

A descriptive analysis of the dependant variable ($M=7.7$, $SD=2.6$) shows that about 8% of the respondents declare a rather low attachment to the country (values 0 to 3 on the 11-point scale), about 20% declare a moderate attachment (values 4 to 6 on the scale) and the rest of about 72% declare a rather high attachment to the country (values 7 to 10 on the scale). Thus, it might be said that the identification with the country, as a dimension of national identification, is, in

general, rather high. The importance given to traditions (M=4.8, SD 1.3) and the religiosity are also high (M=6.4, SD=2.8).

One-way Anova was conducted to determine if strength of emotional attachment to the country was different for categories of respondents having a different ethnic background. There was no statistically significant difference among categories when the first (eth01) indexed was used (F=0.49, p=0.68). Same results were obtained when the second (eth02) was used ((F=0.31, p=0.73).

Table 1 (see below) presents the results of the linear regression model of the emotional attachment to the country. The variable of interest, ethnic background (eth01) is introduced first (model 1), and the rest of the variables are introduced in the following models (2 and 3) in a stepwise manner.

Table 1.

Linear regression model of emotional attachment to the country			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Romanian (ref.)</i>			
Hungarian	-.175	-.282	-.736
Other (homogeneous)	.391	.909	.303
Mixed	-.560	-.505	-.688
Education level		.068**	.058**
Birth year		.035***	.020***
Female		.026	-.241
Urban		.004	.271
Both parents born in RO			-.382
<i>Romanian language (ref)</i>			
Hungarian language			.545
Other language			-1.026
Religiosity			.174***
Importance of tradition			.421***
Cons.	7.711***	5.261***	3.889***
N	1808	1788	1724
R ²	0.22	5.69	14.75
Ll	-4309	-4213	-3985
BIC	8648	8485	8066
AIC	8626	8441	7995

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

First it must be noted that no significant differences appear among the categories of respondents in respect to the ethnic background.

No significant relation is also found between the dependant variable and the place of residence or the gender of the respondents. On the other hand, age has a positive relation with the national identification. The emotional attachment increases with the age of respondent. Unfortunately, data allow only for equivocal interpretation of this result. Two hypotheses might be derived. The first is that what is observed is an effect of ageing, once people grow older, they

become more attached to the place of residence, i.e., the country they live in. The second is that a cohort effect might be present. That is older generations being socialized during the communist epoch, were much more exposed to a nationalist ideology, thus more attached to Romania. Education also has a positive relation with the national identification. The more educated a person is, the higher the attachment to the country. A possible explanation might be that educated people more accurately understand the complex and multi-dimensional citizen-state relations while downgrading the ethnonationalist ideologies.

No significant differences in identification are present in these data for those who Romanian is the primary language used at home and for those who Hungarian is the primary language used at home. Similarly, no significant differences were detected between those who have both parents born in Romania and those having at least one parent born in a different country. However, religiosity and importance people give to traditions have a positive, significant, influence on the emotional attachment to the country in all models. These results are according to the theoretical expectations suggested by the primordial view. That is the more religious a person is, the stronger is his/her identification with the country; and the more importance one gives to traditions the more intense are his/her emotional attachments to the country.

The annex (Table 1a) presents the results of the analysis based on a different version of the index used above. That version of the index splits the category of respondents classified above (Table 1) as ‘other unique ancestry’ in two categories: Roma and other ethnic groups (i.e., German, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Jewish). Relations and significance levels remain the same as in the models presented above.

When the second index (eth02) capturing the ethnic background of respondents (Table 2) is employed in the analysis, similar results are obtained. No significant differences appear among the categories of respondents in respect to the ethnic background.

Table 2.

Linear regression model of emotional attachment to the country			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Romanian (ref.)</i>			
Romanian mixed	-0.544	-0.483	-0.666
Other (homogeneous or mixed)	-0.047	-0.030	-0.490
Education level		.0600**	.052*
Birth year		.034***	.020***
Female		0.017	-0.247
Urban		0.016	0.267
Both parents born in RO			-0.655
<i>Romanian language (ref)</i>			
Hungarian language			0.315

Linear regression model of emotional attachment to the country			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Other language			-0.281
Religiosity			.172***
Importance of tradition			.427***
Cons.	7.711***	5.398***	3.698***
N	1825	1804	1738
R ²	0.13	5.39	14.46
Ll	-4352	-4255	-4022
BIC	8727	8562	8133
AIC	8710	8524	8068

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5. Discussion and conclusions

While views of a cosmopolitan population are utopian beliefs for some, for others they are guiding principles of their lives. On the one hand, the world today seems to be heavily stirred by the differences between new and old knowledges, ideologies, and ways of life, not only within but also among societies. Examples of various forms of identities revival are illustrated almost daily at news televisions and in social media: from the illiberal turn of some Eastern European governments to the attack on the United States Capitol, or from the conflicts in and between the former USSR states, to the ethnic tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina or conflicts in the multi-ethnic societies, like Ethiopia. On the other hand, studies bring evidence that many borders of identities are fading. Examples of such trends are brought, for example, by comparative (time, cohort, age, societies) studies of tolerance towards other groups or categories in various contexts (Comşa & Rusu, 2011; Twenge, Carter, & Campbell, 2015; Janmaat & Keating, 2019)

The paper examined the relation between the ethnic origin and the strength of national identification, as emotional attachment to Romania. On one hand the paper considered the different relationship between nations and states that ethnic and civic perspectives bring. On the other hand, accounted for the significance of the primordial ties and their connection with the ethnic definition of a nation. By running a multivariate analysis on the Romanian ESS9 wave, the article finds clues of undifferentiated degrees of identification with Romania among the categories of people of different ethnic backgrounds (H1). The same is true for the language (H2). Thus, both hypotheses are rejected.

Robust regression run for the full models confirmed all findings. However, a note must be introduced here: results should be treated with caution since the size of some of the categories of ethnic background introduced in the analyses is rather small. Future research, more focused on ethnic groups, could test interaction effects between ethnic background variables and language or the

country of birth of respondents' parents. Multilevel approaches, considering fractionalization indices at localities' level, might be also relevant.

The results do not suggest that ancestry or language, signifying primordial ties, are not connected with the national identification. Rather they point out that in terms of emotional attachment, those who ascribe themselves a Romanian only ancestry and the other respondents declaring completely, or partly "asymmetric" ethnic origins have similar levels of identification with the country.

If the ethnic nation theory, in what concerns Eastern Europe, is assumed, the results might suggest, on one hand, two competing mechanisms of identification. An ethnic one, for those respondents declaring Romanian ancestry. And a modern, participatory mechanism, based on a civic conception of the nation, of the respondents declaring "asymmetric" ethnic origins and nationality. But they also might suggest a conflated model of identification, grounded on both an ethnic and a modern, participatory, conception of the nation. The results may also point out toward the integrative force of the state, exercised by the former communist regime, as a factor underpinning the building process of the nation. No matter how one may decide to read these results, they are consonant with the findings of a different paper investigating the importance of the civic and ethnic criteria that one must consider to be a Romanian (Rusu, 2020). There too, a clear civic - ethnic divide could not be detected. Taken together that results and the results of this paper, bring evidence that exclusive ethnic or civic conceptions of the nation are rather improbable.

On the other hand, as Llobera (1999) points out, the understanding of the collective feelings of national identity is practically *terra incognita*. Even though criticism is made to the affective aspects of primordialism (see also Eller & Coughlan, 1993) conceptions defending the emotional attachment idea exist. Grosby (1994) argues that emotional attachments to primordial elements, like descent or territory, derive from the cognitive perception of these object and the significance they bear for life. However, if that is true, not only primordial elements defining a nation are subject of attachments. Since a modern state protects life and welfare, the civic dimensions of a nation are subject of attachments too. Thus, an explanation of the results obtained in this paper: respondents are equally attached to Romania, no matter if they hold a modern or primordial view of the nation.

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Annex:

Table 1a

Linear regression model of emotional attachment to the country			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Romanian (ref.)</i>			
Hungarian	-.175	-.282	-.736
Roma	.245	1.001	.262
Other (homogeneous)	.763	.687	.414
Mixed	-.560	-.505	-.686
Education level		.069**	.0578*
Birth year		.0348***	.0200***
Female		.024	-.240
Urban		.004	.272
Both parents born in RO			-.368
<i>Romanian language (ref)</i>			
Hungarian language			.545
Other language			-1.032
Religiosity			.174***
Importance of tradition			.420***
_cons	7.711***	5.250***	3.334***
N	1808	1788	1724
R ²	0.20	5,70	14,74
LI	-4309		-4213
BIC	8656		8492
AIC	8628		8443

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$