Doctoral School of Sociology and Communication Science

THESIS SUMMARY

Borbála Oroszi

The anthropological analysis of the identity constituting practices of a contemporary religious renewal community (the Hungarian Schönstatt Movement)

Ph.D. dissertation

Supervisor:

József Kotics, PhD

Professor

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Institute of Communication and Sociology

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1. Introduction – Definition of the subject, problems

The subject of my research paper is the identity constituting mechanisms of a contemporary religious revival movement, the Hungarian Movement of Schoenstatt. I intend to identify and describe the identity aspects that can be observed in the community of the Hungarian Movement of Schoenstatt, how the structural, norm and value system of the international movements are adopted by the members in their everyday life and the characteristics according to which its interpretational framework of symbols is constructed. Moreover, by analyzing the narratives connected to generally accepted norms and symbolic spaces, I intend to reveal the most important material and immaterial elements of community cohesion in regard to the system of values accepted in the community subject to my research. The analytical methods of communication science, sociology and cultural anthropology pertaining to the subject of this research are mixed so as to set up a more complex and comprehensive theoretical and conceptual apparatus.

The research questions I asked during my investigation have been answered on the basis of traditional primary basic research, completed with a deductive empirical analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, in this manner helping answer the hypotheses that arose in connection with the research topic. Starting off from a more general point of view, the first task is to position the Movement among the Roman Catholic religious revival movements in Hungary. Among other things, I have analyzed its characteristics that may make it different from other religious communities that are focused on family values, paying special attention to those features that members may find attractive in the process of joining it. It also seemed possible that the attraction of the Movement is given to it by its characteristic and rich system of symbols, values and norms, therefore I have researched the various forms of its appearance, its use in everyday life and the personal experience of them. afterwards, a deep analysis was done of those aspects of the life of the community, which are basic building elements of the discourse of group identity. Therefore the narratives about the charismatic people who played an important role in the history of the Movement due to their influence on community identity and individual religious identity and the reflective relationship to them are very important. Then, by analyzing the system of values valid in the researched community and the narratives concerning the generally accepted norms and symbolic spaces, the most significant material and spiritual elements of community cohesion were revealed.

The goal of this research paper was to answer questions that arose in connection with the listed topics by the findings of the qualitative and quantitative researches. The exact questions of the research were the following:

1. How can the researched community positioned compared to the other Roman Catholic religious revival movements in Hungary? What are those characteristics of the Movement of Schoenstatt which make it attractive for the members? What underlying motivational mechanisms can be found behind the act of joining the Movement?

2. What are the material (object-centered) and immaterial (spiritual) elements of a community which have the greatest influence on individuals' identity constructing practices? What are the most important values, norms and symbols that are most emphasized in individual narratives strengthening the integrating power of the community?

3. In what way is the feeling of belonging to a community is strengthened by holding individual conversations about charismatic persons who played an important role in the life of the Movement? What play do narratives on outstanding life careers play in creating a community identity?

4. What possibilities of individual fulfilment are at the members' disposal within the value community, which is miticulously structured with clear dividing lines? What are those aspects of the spirituality of the Movement that are significant in strengthening an individual's religious identity?

5. How do the narratives on the picture the community has of its future contribute to strengthening the group identity? What internal tensions may appear in the process of institutionalization due to the growth of the Movement?

My aim was to prepare a research material with the help of the research methodological tools of anthropology, sociology and communication science, the analysis of which may help me answer some hypotheses that arose during my research.

Hypotheses:

I. I suppose that apart from solving the problem of the identity crisis connected to the situation of individuals joining the community, the characteristic teachings and

spirituality of the Movement of Schoenstatt are suitable to satisfy the deep religious needs of individuals and to integrate these into everyday life.

II.   I assume that the system of linguistic-conceptual categories, based on the symbols created in the Movement of Schoenstatt, can be interpreted as a subcultural feature whose significance may be interpreted not just as emphasizing the separation from others but also uniquely as a highly important force of organization in everyday life.

III. I presume that the teachings and the community values of Schoenstatt do not just define exclusively the framework of identification with the religious principles, due to its complex structure it is not limited to a particular element of the identity structure, but it also defines the whole life, the system of values and the action dimensions of an individual.

To be able to give adequate answers to the questions and hypotheses of the research, in the first half of my paper I have investigated the literature that is important to the research and based on this, I determined the framework of the analysis and set up its technical terms. After this, the findings of the empirical research are described and then, drawing the conclusions, in the summary the questions and hypotheses put forward in this chapter were justified or refuted.

2. Theoretical and methodological considerations

I. Theoretical background

In this chapter my aim is to clarify the interpretation of the most important concepts in the dissertation and to place them in context: the question of identity will be discussed first, then that of narrative identity, group identity and finally that of religious identity.

This dissertation is not aimed to raise the problems of definition and to give a comprehensive clarification of them (Bondarenko-Leonova 2010.; Brubaker-Cooper 2000.; Calhoun 1998.; Clarke 2008.; Cohen 1997.; Griffin 1977.; Kántor 2001.; Swann-Bosson 2010.; Újvári 2009.), however, it has to be defined from what aspect the researcher approaches it in the paper and how it is interpreted by the researcher from the aspect of the researched topic.

As a starting point, it can be stated that according to Richard Jenkins, self-consciousness is a learning process based on the interactions of primary socialization, in which the basic form of self-consciousness is created in the relationship of „I" and „myself" (2002:4). From the aspect of our research, this statement is of utmost importance, as it was characteristic of the members of the researched community that they received definite religious education during their primary socialization and this provides them with the basics of their individual identities. The manner in which an individual looks at himself or herself (for instance a Roman Catholic) defines not only their „self-image" and the way they see themselves, but also the way they would like to be seen by others (Jenkins 2002:4). However, it is important to emphasize that the members of the Movement do not compare themselves to „others" or to an „external observer", when they define their identity, it is much more characteristic to take into consideration an „internal" or rather „higher/divine" system of points-of-view.

Before clarifying the approach of the narrative identity which is relevant for the interpretation of the dissertation, I would like to make an excursion discussing the question of *experience*, as in my opinion, these two topics are intertwined, as Marosán put it: the whole personality lives in each and every experience and each experience is aligned with the structure of the complete personality (2016:4).

Traditionally, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz were the first researchers who wrote about the „anthropology of experience" (Turner-Bruner 1986). Their goal was to reveal the manner in which individuals experience their culture and then how they express it through various

manners and narratives (for example through literary works, rituals or life story interviews). Experience is definitely personal, but it also refers to an acting person who can shape the events by his/her presence and through these stories we can become acquainted with the behavior of a person or his/her attitude to situations (Bruner 1986:5) by the narrator putting into words and sharing his/her experience. Garro and Mattingly also agree that creating a narrative is a basic method of giving meaning to experiences as building a narrative is an active and constructive process which depends on the individual and cultural resources surrounding the narrator and is embedded in it (2000:1). For this research paper, narratives are important as the stories help researchers reveal and understand the life of the person participating in the research and that of his/her community from a subjective and confidential perspective into which they would not have insights or they would not be granted access to it.

We can learn the experiences from an individual's narrative, which contains the knowledge of reality (and society within it), the knowledge of narrative topics, the intention to communicate, the model of understanding stories and the context of communication too (Keszeg 2011:29). During the narrative, those events in the life of the individual can be depicted, which give the most exact picture of the narrator's person in the given context. For instance, in our case the objective was to reveal the set of Schoenstatt experiences, so the narrators defined their identity and group identity through it. To sum it up, defining key experiences and putting them in a logical order are important elements of constructing narratives, thus creating representations that continuously re-edit the world (A. Gergely 2018:103) and help define the individual's position in the world at the moment of the narrative.

When defining narrative identity, one of the most frequently quoted authors is Paul Ricoeur (Crowley 2003.; Lengyel 2020.; McCarthy 2007.; Pintér 2012.), whose comprehensive theory on narrative identity is often used as a starting point, both for determining the critique of definition or for developing it further. Ricoeur tries to find an answer to the problem of personal identity while underlining the basically practical character of the narrative and the significance of the communication between the different levels of the narrative, also emphasizing that the narrative and time – or time experience – are organically integrated (Marosán 2016:10). It means that Ricoeur approaches identity through *time and narrative* (Pintér 2012:69). There is a researcher who emphasizes that according to Ricoeur, for the narrative analysis of identity, the relationship of the constant and the changes should be observed during the narrative (Lengyel 2020:172), whereas others highlight in Ricoeur's train of thoughts that wanting to be

identical to myself or wanting to be authentic (to be myself) are not the same (Fehér 2019:300). So when constructing a narrative, an individual either tries to create a logically coherent linear story or tries to share the most authentic version of his/her life story, running the risk of creating breaks in the narrative.

Narrative identity is defined by theoreticians as the internal story of the individual, which is constructed to give some sense to one's life (Setran 2020:94). The process of building narrative identity reveals who the narrator was, who he/she is currently and who he/she would like to become. The integration of these three periods reveals the sense, the aim and the meaning of the narrator's life. Firstly, by investigating the past („past self"), the main events and experiences can be revealed, which help us describe the „present self" (Setran 2020:95). In this phase of the construction of narrative identity those experiences are emphasized, which had a key role in the process when the narrator has become the person he/she accepts himself/herself to be today and who they would like to be in the future. It is a kind of story of origin, „the present self" is established and a direction is given to the „future self" (Setran 2020:95). Moreover, when relating a life story, we try to answer not only the question of who we are, but also the question of why we are here, where we are headed and what is the aim of all this (Setran 2020:97). The narrative self shows how the master narrative, accepted by our society and influenced by our culture, is created through relating the events highlighted at that moment, i. e. how we define ourselves.

Before continuing to put the conceptual background of the thesis in a context, I would like to emphasize hat in this sub-chapter a review has been given on the concept of narrative identity that is relevant to us, which was a starting point to the theory of making narrative interviews, nevertheless, the description of the theoretical background has been separated from its application. The methodology of the practical application of narratives is discussed in Chapter II.2/2.3 on quantitative analysis.

When creating narrative identity, various dimensions may become significant in which an individual places himself or herself. In our research, two such significant elements have been detected in the creation of narratives: the first is the use of a Christian (see: Roman Catholic) system of points of view, the second is emphasizing the fact that one belongs to a group, in this case to the Hungarian Movement of Schoenstatt. Therefore, for the research topic, it is important to introduce the concepts of religious identity and group identity.

The research was mainly focused on the identity constituting practices of the community a considerable part of which was constituted by the construction of the religious identity of individuals through narratives. It is a well-received method in social sciences to investigate religious identity and religious experience through the narrative of the subjects as this religious self is one of the most subjective and most intimate self. Religious identity contains such elements of the personality, the core values, the ideologies, beliefs and morality which are mostly permanent and hardly change during the life of the individual (Cho 2021:10). As has been concluded by earlier researches, the religious self as an integral part of the identity-structure belongs to the narrower group of traditional values (family, homeland etc.) and to the bigger group of cultural (and community) values (Gereben 2005:209), the present research also confirmed that when the identity constituting elements of an expressely religious community are investigated – such as its traditions, rituals etc. – we arrive at a similar conclusion, i. e. group identity is in the focal point of individual self-identity depicted in the narratives because of the religious self and the surrounding religious community. The subjective narratives of the narrators give us a picture of the characteristic Schoenstatt (religious) experience, which not only brings together the community but it also bolsters its community identity and its togetherness. Since in my dissertation these two types are in close connection and on the other hand concerning identities, one can talk not just about individual but collective identity too (Máté-Tóth 2012:206), therefore the factor constituting these two identities are researched and placed together into the conceptual context relevant to the dissertation.

When defining the self, individuals often uses properties, knowledge and feelings which they share with other members of their group (Vincze 2007:251), as according to the theory of community identity, the individual identity derives from one's own group (Sólyom 2015:49). As points of reference, an individual may discover his/her similarities and differences to the members of the chosen group. Individual identity and the narrative created by the individual also contain the group's way of thinking and system of values (Sólyom 2015:49), so it also seems to prove that it is reasonable to focus the research on the narrative identity of the subjects, i. e. the members of the researched group.

All in all, in our case, an individual follows religious motivations when he/she decides to join a community, whose properties he/she tries to share (Máté-Tóth 2012:206), to acquire and to receive to its full extent. The two identity factors –the religious and the collective identity- are in interaction, moreover, during the research it was discovered that they can even strengthen

each other as for the sake of having a more intensive religious experience, individuals join a community which provide frameworks and a system of ideas and rules for this, thus strengthening both religious identity and the sense of belonging to the group. As has been mentioned several times, identity is not a static feature, one of its important properties is that it is „like a process" (Máté-Tóth 2012:207), the more an individual is assimilated and becomes an active participant of the chosen religious community, the stronger their religious identity can become, so the close dynamism of these two factors may accumulate.

II.   Description of the research methodology

The PhD research was a traditional primary basic investigation, a deductive empirical research which was the result of the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The investigating research included an online questionnaire with 117 questions, filled out by 124 respondents, making twenty-five narrative interviews and I made use of the online and offline publications and press releases edited and made available by the Movement of Schoenstatt, so as to put the topic into a context of social history. These contents help understand the researched topic on the one hand, on the other hand they represent the official, central narratives of the Movement. These have a double function in my paper, in some cases like the historical development of the Movement, I relied on their revealing effect when the vision or the internal structure of the community was discussed, on the other hand, they give insights into and cast light on the process in which group identity is formed and strengthened by the community through the media of discourse.

3. Research findings and scientific contributions

In my PhD thesis, the identity constitutive mechanisms of a contemporary religious revival movement, the Hungarian Movement of Schoenstatt are revealed. The data, information and narratives, gathered in my deductive research, have been cleaned, coded, categorized and in the case of interviews they have been recorded, analyzed and interpreted with the help of the theoretical and conceptual framework described in the PhD thesis. In consequence of this research, now the research questions put at the beginning of the thesis paper can be answered and the hypotheses can either be proved or refuted.

Hypothesis I

The first task was to clarify the position of the Movement of Schoenstatt as a community, for this, the conceptual frameworks of the new religious movements and those of the religious revival movements have been described. Based on this, this community has been classified in the category of Roman Catholic religious revival movements as one of the axioms of the movement is the internal renewal of the Roman Catholic Church whereas the religious revival movements depart from their mother church, forming a separate group. It has been clarified that the researched community falls in the category of import movements, being one of the earliest founded such communities in the world, and it is different from all the Roman Catholic monastic orders because families are incorporated in the hierarchy of the order, as opposed to the previous religious practice.

After the analysis of the empirical material, in our answer given to the first research question, it can be stated that joining was always preceded by a situation in one's life full of challenges and on joining the Movement and becoming familiar with its theoretical and practical guidelines, the member receives help to solve these problems. It is important to highlight that the members already had strong religious identities even before they joined so the express goal why they joined was to find a community in which they might have an opportunity to experience a deeper religious belief. The Movement offers a compensation for those who want to remain faithful to the teachings of the church, but seek answers to the current challenges and problems posed to them in their everyday life. It guides them towards a renewed life within the Church and forestalls members' seeking their way outside of the Church. This guidance and its practicality constitute the strength of the Schoenstatt Movement as the teaching of Schoenstatt

emphasizes not only the theoretical aspect of religious life, but uniquely, it also offers practices that can be used in everyday life, which give real answers to the everyday needs of members.

Another field where the Movement of Schoenstatt gave more than the other religious revival communities is its functioning structure, which was attractive to those who wanted to experience a deeper religious life together with their spouse while they did not leave their children to grow up as „orphans of the movement". Christian families are considered units by the Movement of Schoenstatt, the opportunity of spiritual renewal is offered to them together as whole units while they also have possibilities to relax together, thus doing pioneering activities in the Catholic Church while attention was drawn to the potential within the Catholic families.

Identical world views, common values, characteristic notions and a unique manner of expression characterize and define the topics of the discourses distributed by the members of the group and provides a guideline for their interpretation. For instance, it can be observed how the members construct the experience of belonging to a group through the narratives about the center of the Movement. Individuals are distinguished from everyday believers by the common Schoenstatt knowledge base and it lends them an intensive experience of belonging to a community.

During the research, I could prove my first hypothesis as the analysis of the empirical material made it clear that in time the *Roman Catholic believers' self-identity* characteristic of those who join is transformed into a *Schoenstatt identity* that is characteristic in all fields of life.

Hypothesis II

In order to find the answer to the second research question, I have analyzed how the principles of the Christian teaching are interpreted, depicted and implemented in everyday life by the very complex set of symbols used by the Movement. As has been proved, a member of the Schoenstatt community may have a more intensive experience of the Christian religion by acquiring the spirituality of the Movement and by implementing it in everyday life. The meaning of the material (object-centered) and immaterial (spiritual) elements of the Movement and the knowledge of how to use them properly is possible only for deeply dedicated members. However, this subcultural feature does not serve the purpose of separation 'from the other'. In the narratives distributed by the members there is no set of discourses aimed outward that is

interpreted in a negative system of correspondence in connection with 'non-Schoenstatt people'. In the individual narratives, the accounts about values, norms and symbols always emphasized their community binding power, highlighting that through these contact systems – like the worldwide network of Schoenstatt chapels, the network of home shrines and the practice of the capital of grace – all the Schoenstatt members in the world are connected and they give the elementary aspect of Schoenstatt group identity. Besides, a definite and deep experience of belonging to the national community is provided by the significant role of the Hungarian-related symbols, images and symbolic places.

In consequence. by analyzing the empirical material, my second hypothesis can also be proved, i. e. it is not an external reference point that gives the organizing power of the group identity of the system of linguistic-conceptual categories based on the symbols created within the Movement of Schoenstatt, but an internal one, the Schoenstatt spiritual belief. One of its essential features is that the abstract religious elements, i. e. the *'elusive'* are translated by the Schoenstatt rites into everyday language, making them *'palpable'*.

Hypothesis III

The third research question concerned the accounts about the life of charismatic people which refer to social-community and to the individual-subjective world at the same time as the attitude, the system of values, the norms and the world view of the individual are expressed in them. The common points in the individual narratives of life stories also prove that the group helps the individuals through these unified, similar narratives to interpret the world and their position in it. Therefore, the narratives about the founders and the outstanding figures of the Movement of Schoenstatt not only create a frame of the present and esteem it through revealing the past and integrating the major historical moments in discourses, but they also create complex systems of guidelines for the members. These stories define the collective attitudes toward the Church, the clergy, the institution of marriage, the family, God, Mary, the foundation, and the Movement itself. The events reproduced and interpreted through collective memory connect the Schoenstatt members as a collective experience and they provide explanation for the present state such as the creation of the richly illustrated collective values.

The next (IV.) research question focused on the possible variants of individual fulfilment that are available for the members within the finely structured collective values. The analysis goes to show that the working structure of the Movement of Schoenstatt ensures that an individual

may foster an attachment to the community in all life situations, and they may find their place in one of the variable sub-groups. These subgroups offer numerous opportunities for individual fulfilment depending on the gender, age, the level of commitment and the marital status. A member may even spend his/her whole life in this closed system while they create a closer relationship with a Schoenstatt sub-group that is suitable for his/her current state and goals.

This means that my last hypothesis (III.) can be considered to be proved. According to this, the action dimensions of an individual can be defined by the Movement of Schoenstatt ranging from birth and joining the movement to choosing a partner, in adulthood and in the late years of one's life, influencing not just an element of their identity structure but its whole system of aspects and values. The intensity of the individual experience of the Schoenstatt identity, which comprehends all the areas of life, may be subject to different variables (like the duration of the membership or the marital status), but it does not offer possibilities that are different from or independent of the central collective frame of interpretation.

All three hypotheses have been proved by the analysis of the empirical material, however, it is advisable to continue the research as there are a number of attributes of the Hungarian Movement of Schoenstatt that still need investigating and interpreting and could not be discussed in detail in the analytic chapter of the dissertation.

Taking everything into consideration, it can be stated that we managed to create a gap filler analysis in accordance with our original proposal and to make a comprehensive anthropological analysis which (1) reveals the position of the Hungarian Schoenstatt Movement among the Roman Catholic religious revival movements in Hungary and shows (2) the everyday life of the community not from an „external", „bird's-eye-view", more general point of view, but it also takes into account and reveals an „internal" perspective, writing a PhD thesis similar to a „deep drill".

In my dissertation it has been shown what internal and external effects made a Roman Catholic religious revival movement – which appeared in Hungary before the change of the political regime and started to spread rapidly after the change of the regime – the extended, structured hierarchical value community built on characteristic attributes in its present form. The most important elements of the constituent aspects of collective identity have been detected and the Movement's system of symbols and norms and the effects they have on the identity of individuals have been analyzed. In accordance with my previously set goals, I managed to

reveal and identify the organizational and functional logic of this contemporary religious revival movement and the present its complex value and knowledge base to the scientific community.

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