Romanian Media Accounts of St. Valentine and Dragobete: Ethical Challenges on Reporting about Multicultural Traditions

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Abstract: The paper analyses an unethical media account of two celebrations, St. Valentine and Dragobete. If in 2018 The Romanian National Television posted on Social Media an appropriate account of St. Valentine Holiday, in 2019 the situation was completely different. While reporting on St. Valentine, the media trust considered appropriate to present it in an unjustified comparison with the Dragobete celebration of 24th of February, described as an authentic Romanian celebration of love. While reporting about Dragobete, the celebration was again compared with Valentine's Day, the second reduced to the adopted American tradition of love celebration, whereas the first described as the appropriate one for Romanians to celebrate. None of the two media accounts remained true to the history of either celebration. St. Valentine is a Christian Holiday with Ancient European roots, however controversial the love celebration tradition may be, as the second is a Romanian pagan celebration. There was no need to account for the two events in an antagonistic manner. A separate account of the two celebrations would have been more appropriate. If the Romanian television decided to promote Dragobete as an important Romanian celebration on Social Media, it could have done so without relating it to St. Valentine. Moreover, these accounts disregard the Romanian Catholic communities which celebrate Valentine, the martyr priest, on the 14th of February. The paper discusses how both media accounts disregard the ethical recommendations on reporting about multiculturalism and generate an unnecessary state of conflict between the communities who celebrate one or both holidays.

Keywords: *mass media ethics; social media; multiculturalism; holiday; promoting national values.*

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1. Introduction

In the month of February 2019, The Romanian National Television reported on St. Valentine and on Dragobete, two celebrations only ten days apart, the first, on the 14th, the second on the 24th, posting also on Social Media on both occasions comparative accounts that we consider to be inadequate due to the fact that they suggest an unnecessary competition between the two celebrations on a national criterion. Saint Valentine's holiday was presented in 2019 by The National Television as a foreign holiday, in comparison with Dragobete, a traditional Romanian celebration of love.

It is our opinion that the accounts of the two celebrations are not recommended from an ethical point of view in a multicultural society and we will analyse the matter in the present paper.

2. The National Media news reports

On 14th of February 2018, The Romanian National Television posted on its Facebook pages an objective account on Valentine's Day, consisting of a brief description of the holiday's origins and history, the legend of the martyr priest who celebrated Christian marriages in a time when Christianity was outlawed (TVR Official Website, 14th February, 2018 and TVR2 Facebook page, 14th February 2018) and shared a link to the 2015 account on its news site that mentions Dragobete as the Romanian traditional celebration of love, opposed to the adopted Saint Valentine holiday, even though it does so in the more appropriate context of describing Spring as the season of rebirth and of world love celebrations (TVR News, 14th February, 2015).

In 2019, the situation was completely different. On 14th February 2019, The Romanian National Television reported on St. Valentine on its Facebook page, not with a story related to the holiday, but with the Romanian celebration of Dragobete: "Romanians traditionally celebrate love on 24th of February, on Dragobete, with the beginning of Spring and love, as nature, rebirths, but in the last years the celebration of 14th of February was also adopted as Lovers Day" (TVR1 Facebook page, 14th February 2019). This short post instead of reporting on the main event of the day mentions another and is followed by a link to the news site account which again states that Dragobete is the Romanian traditional celebration of love, and reviews some of Saint Valentine's myths and legends (TVR News, 14th February 2019).

On 23th of February 2019, The Romanian National Television posted on its Facebook page: “If the Americans have Valentine's Day, us, The Romanians, have The Dragobete. Each year, on 24th of February, we traditionally celebrate love.” (TVR1 Facebook page, 23th February 2019). The text is followed by a link to the news site in which further information is given about the celebration: “Dragobete is an Ancient Dacian character transformed in a patron of love and a protector of the young.” (TVR News, 24th February 2019). Beginning a report on Dragobete with Valentine's Day placed the two in antithesis again. The media posts presented above reduced Saint Valentine holiday to the American culture and the Romanian nation to the celebration of Dragobete.

Historically, the first Saint Valentine celebration was proclaimed by Pope Gelasius in 496, and, even if later removed from the saint Calendar in 1969, for lack of reliable information about his life, The Roman Catholic Church still recognizes him as a Saint and celebrates two martyrs with the name of Valentine on the 14th of February.¹ Commemorating Saint Valentine gave birth to a tradition of love celebration on this day and Saint Valentine became the patron saint of the engaged to be married.

One of the legends that could have generated the love celebration tradition is described in Encyclopedia Britannica: “According to legend, St. Valentine signed a letter “from your Valentine” to his jailer’s daughter, whom he had befriended and healed from blindness. Another common legend states that he defied the emperor’s orders and secretly married couples to spare the husbands from war.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

The National Television Social Media post from 2018 reports that Valentine, a Roman third century priest, continued to officiate secret marriages with the price of his life when emperor Claudius The Second banned marriages in order to have more enrolling soldiers. It is said that the priest wrote a letter to the guardian's daughter also named Valentina, whom he fell in love with, with the specification “to my Valentine”, an expression included in the present customs (TVR2 Facebook page, 14th February 2018).

Added to these legends, “in Medieval times it was believed that on this day the bird began nesting” and Saint Valentine was associated with the “life giving love” (Romano Catholic Calendar, 2011).

There are also many pagan celebrations which are dedicated to love and rebirth in the Spring, such as the festivities of Lupercalia in Ancient Rome or the customs related to the mythical figure of Dragobete, which some ethnologists consider it to be Dacian rooted, and others a relatively

¹ Both of them martyrs of Ancient Rome - one a priest, the other Bishop of Terni.

recent tradition. According to the legend, was the son of Baba Dochia, a woman who marks the return of spring. Dragobete became a celebration of romantic love in many areas of Romania since, as Saint Valentine holiday, it is on “the time when birds are betrothed”. Mostly celebrated in rural areas and promoted in the media, it attracted celebrators amongst the youth from the urban areas, as well.

In the last years, many Romanians of different religions began to celebrate Saint Valentine. In fact, a series of western holidays began to be popular in Romania, some having no historical relevance for Romanian communities at all. It is the case of Halloween. Although its name is relatively recent (it means All Saints' Eve because it is celebrated on the Eve of the Catholic Holiday of All Saints), the pagan celebration has a long tradition, starting from the festivities of Parentalia and continuing with the Celtic Samhain. It is mostly popular in the U.S. Even if it has no connection to Romanian traditions, it became popular in the recent past.

Accounting on Halloween, an adopted controversial celebration in our country, The National Television posted on Social Media on the 1st of November the wish “Happy Halloween” (TVR2 Facebook page, November 1st 2019), and posted a link to the news site where it reports that “In Romania, Halloween already has a few years long tradition and it is usually celebrated in clubs at costume parties, and, in Count Dracula's House, at Bran Castle, the coolest Halloween party is being prepared.” (TVR News, 31 October, 2019). One could consider this report as a suggestion to celebrate Halloween.

Even though the belief in *strigoi*, namely *vampires*, has been genuine in some Romanian areas, Romanians did not accustom to disguise themselves as vampires in order to escape them, as the Halloween customs require. In fact, the identification of famous ruler Vlad Țepeș with Dracula or Bran Castle's association with Dracula's castle is mostly fiction based and it is criticized by many historians. Its practice is justified by commercial and touristic purposes rather than by historical data.

However, even if there is no historical justification for Halloween in Romania, embracing it as a new tradition posed no problems for The National Television to account for it as such, with no mention of it being controversial in some Romanian (orthodox) communities.

Meantime, Saint Valentine is part of The Ancient European Roman and Christian legacy, and is relevant for the both the country's history, as a celebration of the Catholic community, as well as for its recent past, since it began to be celebrated by a larger number of Romanians.

But on the Social Media posts discussed above, Saint Valentine holiday is not presented on its own, as Halloween is. Instead, it is viewed as a tradition of love celebration of other nations, as opposed to the Dragobete celebration, which is traditionally Romanian. Placed in antithesis by a misguided national criterion, it is thus suggested that the latter is more appropriate to be celebrated by Romanians. Moreover, on accounting for Dragobete, Valentine's Day is again described as a celebration of other nationalities, underlining the idea that Dragobete is the authentic one, thus suggesting that all Romanians (should) celebrate it. Dragobete, although with an important tradition in many of our country's rural areas (however lacking ethnologic agreement upon its origins), attracted national attention only after media promotion, and is not a national holiday.

There already is much misguided antagonism between the two celebrations as reflected in the Social Media user's comments in the form of hate speech that we will not cite in the article. One user's comment on the Social Media post from 4th February 2019 said: "If even The National Television started promoting other holidays and not the Romanian/traditional ones, I find this to be very sad. On 24th of February we have Dragobete." TVR1 replied: "As it says in our post" (TVR1 Facebook page, 14th February 2019). This reply declares favoritism of the latter celebration.

Not accurately reporting on Saint Valentine and promoting Dragobete on Social Media over the first on a national criterion only adds to this antagonism.

3. Media cases of misguided antagonism

The origins of this antagonism are to be found in frictions between religious confessions based on the antithesis between the couple ancestral/orthodox/rural/traditional/national on one side and western/catholic/urban/nontraditional/foreign on the other side.

Some orthodox media sources reflect a strong aversion against the celebration of Saint Valentine. These media sources report inaccurately and unethically on Saint Valentine, some denying its religious significance all together. "So, we make no mistake when we say that Valentine's Day, with all its "marketing" is in Romania - and not only – a "holiday without a feted person." (Creștinortodox.ro, 14th February 2019). Basilica News Agency reports on the date on which the orthodox calendar mentions the "real Saint Valentine", admitting that there is little information about him. The report states that the catholic calendar does not mention Saint Valentine on the 14th

of February, conveniently leaving out the mention of the very same martyr priest Valentine as the Orthodox celebrate as a saint²: “No one knows exactly who truly is the Saint Valentine commemorated” on 14th of February”. (Basilica News Agency, 14 February 2019).

Another post of the same news agency mentions that “A saint that we do not know much about generates a pseudo holiday of love more or less superficial on the 14th of February. The national culture invites us to a similar celebration on the 24th of February, but, the orthodox one has always offered a continuous celebration of love, in God.” (Basilica News Agency, 14th February 2019). On 2014 the news site publishes an article about the celebrations of Dragobete by the students of The Theological Seminar of Iași, which “have as purpose bringing back our ancestral traditions and removing from the Romanian space the day called „Valentine’s Day” and publishes the pr. Director Dragoș Bahrim's stamen: “In the later years western traditions started to root in our country, ripping out of the ground labored by our ancestors the tree of our Romanian tradition. A “celebration that directly sticks the Romanian spirituality is the one called “Valentine’s Day” or “Saint Valentine” of February the 14th very popular among the young that remember less and less the day of 24th February, called “Dragobete Day”, an authentic Romanian holiday (...)” (Basilica News Agency, 27th of February 2014).

Even though not a religious celebration, we notice the declared wish that Dragobete replaced Saint Valentine, avoiding the latter, and avoiding it must we do, since Saint Valentine represents a menace to our national identity, according to the cited sources.

Other media reports describe Saint Valentine as an “imported western catholic holiday” that should not be celebrated and should not to replace the traditional rural celebration of Dragobete. If the holiday is catholic, then it cannot be imported, since catholic communities exists in our country. Only customs and practices on this day that may differ from a country or another and may be imported or not. For instance, the American celebration “Valentine's Day” consists of its own customs that we may borrow or not.

The catholic celebration of a Saint is misguidedly placed in competition with the celebration of the non-Christian character of Dragobete, since the two could never replace each other. Orthodox media

² The catholic calendar commemorates two martyrs with the name of Valentine on this day, one of them being the very Bishop of Terni whom The Orthodox church celebrates as a Saint on the 30 of July.

should be more respectful of the holidays of other confessions. However, it is true that the date of Saint Valentine celebration differs in the two confessions (the birth or the martyrdom date, according to each confession's calendar). The orthodox media sources should report on the correct date of their confession celebration of Saint Valentine without discrediting the Catholic celebration. At most, a report could state the status of the martyr's sanctity in the catholic religion. So, from a religious point of view, each confession celebrates Valentine on different dates.

Although Dragobete is celebrated on the same day with an important Orthodox holiday,³ the mythical character of Dragobete is not Christian. Even if the two holidays were both religious, there would still be no need for competition between the two celebrations, much less on a national criterion, since there are several Romanian Christian confessions that (should) respect each other's holidays.

It is true that often the original meaning of many religious holidays may not be as obvious in celebrations. Christmas became X-mas and its media representations are less about the birth of Jesus Christ and more about 'The Christmas Spirit, or the magical entity of Santa Claus. Easter celebrates Christ' Resurrection, but many customs and media representations are related to the magical Easter Bunny. Saint Valentine is no exception. Eros, the Roman god of love and its predecessor, the Greek Cupid, are often remembered on Saint Valentine.

Comparing a Christian holiday, however stripped of its religious meaning and however commercial its celebration might have become, with a pagan one, even though also romantic love-related, merely on a national misunderstood criterion is not, in our opinion, recommended.

February the 14th, is not the only day the Christians must celebrate love. A true Christian daily declares his love for God: "the true Christian wishes to convert every moment of his life in a sincere declaration of the love for God, the source of Good" (Romano Catholic Calendar, 2011). With this statement The Orthodox Church agrees: "When should love be celebrated? In every day" (Basilica News Agency, 14th February, 2019). So, it is of little importance for Christians if the tradition of celebrating love on Saint Valentine on the 14th of February even after the removal of Valentine from the General Saint Calendar still lives on, or if Saint Valentine holiday did not give rise to an equally famous tradition of love celebration in the Orthodox culture on the day he is commemorated.

³ Some ethnologists relate the name of Dragobete with the Slavon name of the holiday that became, over time, a Surname. Others relate it to "drag, dragul", meaning "the loved one".

All mass media have to accurately report on relevant events for the multicultural community, and in our opinion the reports described above do not do justice nor to the celebrations, nor to the communities celebrating them, but fuel the hatred between cultural communities. The National Television, as representative of all Romanian communities should by no means contribute to the multicultural gap by siding with the view point of any of the country's religious communities.

2. Reporting on multiculturalism

Mass media ethics demands to report on events that are relevant for a community, even if that community is a minority. Reporting on Saint Valentine was, from this point of view, necessary, not as news about foreign events, but as a celebration relevant for our country.

Reviewing February love celebrations while reporting on the first holiday in the month may be recommended from an ethical point of view, as in a multicultural society it is recommended to cover as many of the customs and traditions specific to all cultures as possible. Of course, a news report is not a cultural anthropology documentary and cannot cover all the cultural meanings of holidays. Celebrations of love in Spring are related to the changes that nature undergoes in plant growth, animal mating and food productions, symbolizing life, fertility and rebirth. Common to all cultures, celebration of love continues to the present day, even if each culture does so in different ways. However, some celebrations transgress national borders. It is the case of religious holidays that are shared by different nations, or the case in which the same nations have different religious celebrations. When this is the case (and it is with Saint Valentine), it is appropriate to report on the holidays without generating a state of competition between the religious confessions or cultures. The mere reporting on the events does not mean promoting them, but respecting the communities that those events are relevant for.

The main duty in a multicultural society mass media have is to mediate conflict, not generate new tensions between cultures. Comparing two celebrations and placing them in a (false) state of competition from is not deontological correct. Reporting on a holiday with a description of another celebration induces the idea that the latter is more culturally relevant.

An adequate report on St. Valentine would have begun with an account of its significance and relevance for the audience. This report could have been followed by a review of other relevant holidays and practices,

among which Dragobete is to be found, as it chronologically follows it. When necessary, a mention of the celebrations of other religious confessions could be made, as well. In the case of Saint Valentine, a mention of the date of the orthodox celebration of the saint would have been appropriate.

Promoting traditional holidays, namely Dragobete, is allowed, if done so without discrediting other holidays or comparing to them on national misunderstood criterion. It is not recommended to take it on a as motto ("Romanians traditionally celebrate love on Dragobete) and place it whenever reporting about other love celebrations, such as Saint Valentine. And, since Saint Valentine precedes Dragobete, any reference to it or to the American variation of Valentine's Day is no longer necessary. We understand the desire that Dragobete becomes as popular in Romania as Valentine's Day is in America, or the pride of having such a celebration in our country. Media promotion of Dragobete celebration among the young whom are less in touch with archaic rural customs is important for preserving the country's cultural heritage, but its ancestral character is not to be generalized to the point of becoming a condition or a mark of Romanian nationality.

All media reports on celebrations should pay attention to the distinction between cultural heritage and national heritage, even if in the case of intangible patrimony. We must distinguish cultural heritage from national heritage as follows: "Heritage can play an influential role in cultivating a sense of national identity around a national culture. However, it is important not to conflate the idea of a national culture with the empirically false claim that nations are culturally homogeneous: indeed, the intranational diversity of cultures is the fact from which the political problem of multiculturalism arises." (Matthes, 2018).

This means that identification of one of the celebrations with a national mark or the exclusion of the other for lacking that mark is incorrect if both of the celebrations are cultural relevant. The media reports we analyzed in the present paper relate to the cultural importance of both holidays for our nationality in a multicultural lacking approach.

Aidan White offers a diversity checklist in order to ensure a media report that does justice to all cultures. On this list, we find the following questions: "Have I any prejudicial attitude to the issue at the heart of story I am covering?", "Am I using the correct terms to describe people or their culture?", "Have I used a variety of opinions and sources including from minority groups?", "Is there a dominant discourse?", "Have I ensured that my work does not reflect stereotypes?", "Have I considered the impact of the story or the images on the lives of others?" (White, 2008: 97,98).

From this standpoint we find the National Television Social Media Reports on Saint Valentine and Dragobete in 2019 to be less diverse than recommended.

The reports do have a dominant speech. On both reports, it is the theme of Dragobete celebration as the national/traditional/authentic one, shared by the orthodox majority media sources. The ethnographic data supporting the national generalization are however insufficiently reported about. Nothing is mentioned about the lack of ethnologic agreement upon the Dragobete celebration origins. Instead, both reports revolve around the cultural stereotypes of authentic/national traditions versus western ones. The attitude was prejudicial against Saint Valentine's holiday themed as an adopted tradition. The groups celebrating Saint Valentine are viewed as adopters of traditions not belonging to our nation. The prejudice against embracing new celebrations is clear. The significance of this day for the catholic community of Romania is not sufficiently clear, generating ambiguities and the status of Valentine as a martyr priest in the catholic community is not mentioned. The reports on Saint Valentine also lack a mention of the orthodox holiday of the saint, which could have clarified the Christian significance of the holiday and the choice of the celebration date. Moreover, the intention to promote the celebration of Dragobete as an event of national importance (or a trade mark of Romanian culture) is clear. Presenting Dragobete as a Romanian traditional holiday could influence the public's choice to actually celebrate one over the other on misguided criterion.

Even if the community is relatively newly formed, it still has the right to media accurate representation without judgmental statements on national criterion. The young celebrating Saint Valentine although unrelated to the catholic tradition themselves, the community embracing Halloween, all have the right to media representation. However, since the pagan Halloween celebration was almost encouraged by The National Television reports, despite the opposition from the Orthodox Church towards celebrating it, it appears the discussed reports are a misguided attempt to promote Dragobete, and not to favor the orthodox community over other confessions, religion or atheist ones.

The present paper already mentioned that accurately reporting on events specific to a cultural minority does not mean promoting the event, but offering correct media representation. The National Television reports correctly on events of different religious confessions of our country and it is unfairly blamed by the majority of promoting those confessions when doing so.

The National Television has this year successfully reported on the visit of Pope Francis in Romania dedicating live transmissions from all events The Pope attended to on the duration of His Sanctity's visit. The National Television's initiative was laudable, because His Sanctity's visit was of significant historical relevance for the entire country, and not only for the catholic community (the latter alone would have been enough reason). The National Television was the official broadcaster and wrote on Social Media that it was "the largest live transmission in the Romanian television history" (TVR1 Facebook Page, 4th of June, 2019). The broadcast was not without its critics. In fact, a series of users accused The National Television of promoting catholic religion instead of promoting Orthodox event. Other users accused the page administrators of being too permissive with hateful comments about Catholicism. Many orthodox users applauded the initiative and welcomed the dialogue.

One should understand that giving an accurate report of this historical event does not mean promoting a certain religion. In fact, not reporting about it would be the unforgivable media ethics error.

This is the reason why The National Television broadcasts important celebrations of the country's religious confessions, as it does on Easter, mostly celebrated on different dates by the catholic, orthodox and protestant communities, or as it reports on Christmas both on the old as on the new rite date. On Saint Valentine a mention of its catholic significance and of the date in which other of our country' religious confessions - the orthodox, celebrate would have been recommended as well. This is because all cultures and religious confessions should be allowed accurate media representation.

6. Conclusions

Our analysis shows that reporting on the holiday of Saint Valentine in an antagonistic manner with the celebration of Dragobete and vice versa, trying to promote the second on an insufficiently documented national criterion does no justice to any of the events. A more adequate approach would be presenting their significance separately and describing their cultural relevance for the Romanian space, both for the historical communities as well as for the newly formed ones. In the case of Saint Valentine, more data about the Christian meaning of the holiday and its celebration date in all Romanian confessions would have been appropriate. In the case of Dragobete, a separate approach of it as a celebration of love and its relevance for our country would have been more appropriate. A review of spring love celebrations, Christian or pagan, without presenting them

antagonistically would have been appropriate. The National Television is a public television and should report more carrying than other media sources when it comes to multiculturalism, and should avoid using stereotypes and ambiguous expressions, because not reporting adequately only contributes to the frictions between the different communities in our country.

Mass media have the duty to correctly report on the cultural implications of the events with respect to all cultures. As opinion generators, when promoting an event as one of national relevance, it must ensure doing so does not prejudice minority cultures and communities while favouring the majority.

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