

UNDERDEVELOPED SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS VASILE BĂNCILĂ'S THINKING ABOUT CELEBRATION

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ABSTRACT

Vasile Băncilă, a Romanian philosopher and ethicist, is one of the few Romanian authors who are concerned with the issue of holidays. Even if he focused more on the ethics of holidays, Vasile Băncilă's work contains several concepts with potential use in the sociological analysis of festive time. The present material represents a minor attempt to develop those concepts discovered by Vasile Băncilă that are relevant for the sociological analysis of celebration, but which were insufficiently developed by the philosopher from Brăila. Among these concepts are the holiday receptivity, holiday potency, and the treasure troves of holiday.

Keywords: Vasile Băncilă, holiday, sociology of holiday, holiday ethics.

One Romanian philosopher that is poorly known to the public is Vasile Băncilă, a native of Brăila county. An ethicist, philosopher of knowledge, and exegete of Lucian Blaga's work, Vasile Băncilă is one of the few Romanian researchers concerned with the issue of celebration. In the following sections, some concepts are developed from the theoretical apparatus that philosopher has discovered on this issue.

1. FRAMING THE ISSUE OF CELEBRATION IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF VASILE BĂNCILĂ

Vasile Băncilă, recognised at the time for his studies on the holiday³²⁷, was no stranger to the science of sociology. The way in which he analyses the feast is derived from both his sociological and ethical visions. The celebration represents a point at the intersection of the two visions and represents a means of understanding both.

Vasile Băncilă's sociology goes by the name of "spiritual organicism" and is centred on the individual's connection with the social whole.

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³²⁷ Gheorghiu Geană, „Băncilă, Vasile”, in *Enciclopedia online a filosofiei din România*, Available at: <https://romanianphilosophy.ro/encyclopedia/bancila-vasile/>, Accessed on April 30, 2025.

“In sociology, V.B.’s position is contrary to empirical sociologism; society appears as the ‘organic medium’ that connects man to the ‘totality’, the ‘instrument’ through which a ‘deeper volition of things’ creates differentials, taking man to the limit of his destiny. V.B. calls this conception ‘spiritual organicism’ and designates the ‘ethnic’ as the most proper type of this society”³²⁸.

Vasile Băncilă asserted that the holiday represents a total organisation of existence. Expression of community when people follow social norms and ethical precepts.

“The idea of celebration is an idea of total organization of existence. Because the feast is a serious communion with all of reality, with all its necessary, possible, imaginable or only suspected aspects. It is a communion with the transcendent; it is a communion with cosmic nature; it is a communion with society; it is even a communion with the animal and vegetable world; and it is, finally, a communion with oneself, by containing or melting away contradictions, [one’s] deceptions, [one’s] claims”³²⁹.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF SOME CONCEPTS DISCOVERED BY VASILE BĂNCILĂ ABOUT CELEBRATION

In the following, we will analyse from a sociological perspective some concepts discovered by Vasile Băncilă in the problem of celebration. The analysis aims to develop sociologically these concepts that the philosopher from Braila did not manage to develop.

While the concept of celebration was developed by Vasile Băncilă, the celebratory receptivity, the festive potency, and the festive reservoir have only been mentioned in passing (some of which he did not even define). Even briefly mentioned, their potential for sociological analyses of celebration is clear. The next chapters discuss their sociological potential.

2.1. Holiday receptivity

The first concept considered is “holiday receptivity”. Vasile Băncilă notes that a holiday is a time of collective celebration in which preparation is necessary.

³²⁸ „În sociologie, poziția lui V.B. este contrară sociologismului empiric; societatea apare drept «mediul organic» care îl leagă pe om de «totalitate», «instrumentul» prin care o «voință mai adâncă a lucrurilor» creează diferențial, ducând omul până la limita destinului său. V.B. numește această concepție «organicism spiritual» și desemnează «etnicul» drept tipul cel mai propriu al acestei societăți”, in *Ibidem*.

³²⁹ „Ideea de sărbătoare e o idee de organizare totală a existenței. Fiindcă sărbătoarea e o horă gravă de comuniune cu toată realitatea, cu toate aspectele ei necesare, posibile, imaginabile sau numai bănuite. E o comuniune cu transcendentul; e o comuniune cu natura cosmică; e o comuniune cu societatea; e chiar o comuniune cu lumea animală și vegetală și e, în sfârșit, o comuniune cu tine însuși, prin conținerea sau topirea contradicțiilor, [a] decepțiilor, [a] revendicărilor”, in Vasile Băncilă, „Declinul sărbătorii” [“The decline of the holiday”], in *Opere [Works]*, Vol. IV, Edited by Dora Mezdrea, Brăila, Istros Publishing House, 2006a, p. 339.

According to Băncilă, preparation enhances holiday receptivity. The more one prepares for the feast, the higher their receptivity to the occasion and the greater their level of joy.

“(...) In the past, people prepared for celebrations by increasing their holiday receptivity and then experienced reverberations. These days, the holiday comes and goes like a fast train, from which travellers have no time to get off”³³⁰.

Receiving refers to man’s ability to align themselves with the feast (with the general norms, with its specific meanings). We “receive the holiday” when we are in harmony with what we are currently meant to be.

According to Băncilă, the period leading up to a celebration is as important as the celebration itself for understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the social time of a celebration can be divided into two periods: before the celebration begins and during the actual moment of the celebration. To fully comprehend how society celebrates, it is necessary to examine both the preparation and celebration phases.

The disparity between preparation time and actual celebration lies in the volume of work required. For instance, the Easter holiday. While there are tasks during the feast itself that demand effort – such as preparing the Easter meal and serving the guests – most of the work is completed prior to the feast’s commencement (preceding the night of the resurrection).

The lack of preparation is also why the “new” holidays are not as well received as the village-specific ones. For example, to properly observe the Easter feast, Christians must fast, clean their homes, and prepare special dishes. On the other hand, the holidays “invented” by international organisations do not require any preparation. No wonder people celebrate them with less intensity than the former, if not ignore them altogether.

2.2. The holiday potency

The second concept must be understood in relation to the meaning attributed by society to the celebration. Using Max Weber’s terminology, we observe that the “holiday potency” increases if the social action during the celebration approaches the ideal-type of rational-value action since, as Vasile Băncilă points out, the holiday is the time when man puts himself in line with the values of the community, especially religious values. In other words, if the social actor acts in accordance with moral-religious values during the feast, then his “holiday potency” reaches its peak:

“Social action, like all action, may be oriented in four ways: (...) value-rational (...) determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical,

³³⁰ „(...) odinioară, oamenii se pregăteau pentru serbări, mărindu-și receptivitatea sărbătorească, pentru ca apoi să trăiască ecourile. Acum, sărbătoarea vine și dispare ca un tren rapid, din care călătorii nici n-au timp să coboare”, in *Ibidem*.

aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success”³³¹.

This is why the “holiday potency” is high in the cultural man (the one who acts in accordance with moral values). We note the term culture in the sense of Băncilă. For the Romanian author, culture is the action of the human being in line with what he calls substantive harmony, the perfect world to which humanity aspires (the beautiful, the good and the true).

“However, the process of culture is more complex and freer. And it involves the two planes that only the spirit has: the phenomenal, the historical – and the essential world: the natural and the metaphysical”³³².

“Culture cannot be understood without the metaphysical element, as it is primarily an accommodation of human beings to metaphysical reality, whereas civilisation is related to phenomena, as it is an accommodation to sensible and fragmented reality”³³³.

For Vasile Băncilă, the religious man is superior to the cultural man. This is why the ethicist attributes a higher degree of “holiday potency” to Christian celebrations than to non-Christian ones.

“The greatest holiday potency is, of course, religious holidays. The idea that reality has a deeper meaning that is more evident than in religion”³³⁴.

The expression “holiday potency” denotes that holidays have the power to homogenise people’s actions. It is the time when, as Vasile Băncilă points out, everyone “shares the same meaning”, and it is precisely for this reason, we speak of “a kind of personal anonymity” of the human being in the celebration. For a short time, the ego gives way to the collective we, with “the feeling of full communion with society” prevailing.

“Holiday is the radiant feeling of everyone sharing the same meaning, which comes to fill all reality, conceived as an endless providential order. Holiday is unified and transfigured existence”³³⁵.

³³¹ „Acțiunea socială, ca orice fel de acțiune, poate fi orientată în patru feluri: (...) rațional de valoare (...) determinată de către credință într-o valoare supremă de tip etic, estetic, religios sau de altă natură, independent de probabilitatea obținerii succesului”, in Max Weber, *Economy and Society, an Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Vol. I, California, California Press, 1978, p. 24.

³³² „Procesul culturii e însă mult mai complex și mai liber. Și el implică cele două planuri, pe cari nu le are decât spiritul: fenomenul, istoricul – și lumea din adânc: natural și metafizic”, in Vasile Băncilă, „Sensul culturii și «culturalizarea» satelor (I)” [“The meaning of culture and the ‘culturalization’ of villages (I)”], in *Rânduiala*, Year I, Vol. IV, p. 375.

³³³ „Cultura nu se poate înțelege fără factorul metafizic, ea fiind o acomodare a omului în primul rând la realitatea metafizică, pe când civilizație se raportează la fenomen, ea fiind o acomodare la realitatea sensibilă și fragmentară”, in *Ibidem*.

³³⁴ „Cea mai mare potență festivă o au, desigur, sărbătorile religioase. Ideea că realitatea are un sens adânc nicaieri nu e mai evidențiată decât în religie”, in Vasile Băncilă, „Pedagogia sărbătorii” [“Pedagogy of celebration”], in *Opere [Works]*, Vol. IV, Edited by Dora Mezdrea, Brăila, Istros Publishing House, 2006b, p. 532.

³³⁵ „Sărbătoarea e sentimentul luminos al împărtășirii tuturor din același sens, care ajunge să umple toată realitatea, concepută ca o nesfârșită ordine providențială. Sărbătoarea este existența unificată și transfigurată”, in Vasile Băncilă, „Duhul sărbătorii” [“The holiday spirit”], in *Opere [Works]*, Vol. IV, Edited by Dora Mezdrea, Brăila, Istros Publishing House, 2006c, p. 330.

“It [the holiday] is, first of all, a kind of personal anonymity, which is a participation of the person in the mystery of the general existence, and at the same time a harmonious empowerment of the person through the spring of life of the general”³³⁶.

“For the holiday is the feeling of full communion with society and with the cosmos or with the general reality, being, on top of that, the feeling of absolute coincidence with yourself, without contradictions and artificialities, without limits and miseries”³³⁷.

2.3. The treasure troves („zăcământ”) of holiday

If, in the previous chapter, we made it clear that the feast, and especially the religious feast, can provide the same social meanings. It bears the name of the “treasure troves of holiday” and is part of the “spiritual capital” of the collectively.

“There is too much emphasis on ‘pagan’ holidays and ‘superstitions’ and not enough attention is paid to the spiritual capital of this folklore of beliefs and holidays, which can and should be used in schools”³³⁸.

In Romanian treasure troves („zăcământ”) means something precious deep in the ground. Vasile Băncilă chooses the name of the concept conscious of the quality of the holiday to actualise the meanings that lie in the depths of a people’s culture, those rooted because they have guided the lives of many generations. The celebration is a new enactment of something that has happened repeatedly in the past. The human relationship to meaning binds present and past celebrations. The breakdown of meaning, the phenomenon of replacing the meanings of past celebrations with new ones, is an indicator of the degradation of the festive season, which is manifested in a decline in the “holiday potency”.

The treasure considered necessary for authentic celebrations by Vasile Băncilă is traditional folklore. Folklore fits very well with the term “treasure” because of its undeniable antiquity.

“(…) must look carefully and with infinite respect for the traditional world of our traditional villages and the treasures of folklore, where the treasure troves of holiday celebrations are preserved (…)”³³⁹.

The concept is also a criterion for distinguishing between degraded and authentic holidays. Holidays that lack links to meanings that have been celebrated for dozens, if not hundreds, of generations fall into the category of degrading. From

³³⁶ „E [sărbătoarea] mai întâi, un fel de anonimat personal, care e o participare a persoanei la taina existenței generale, și totodată o potențare armonioasă a persoanei prin izvorul de viață al generalului”, in Vasile Băncilă, *quoted work*, 2006a, p. 339.

³³⁷ „Căci sărbătoarea e sentimentul comunității depline cu societatea și cu cosmosul sau cu realitatea generală, fiind, pe deasupra, și sentimentul absolutei coincideri a ta cu tine însuși, fără contradicții și artificialități, fără limite și mizerii”, in Vasile Băncilă, *quoted work*, 2006c, p. 330.

³³⁸ „Se insistă prea mult asupra sărbătorilor «păgânești» și [a] «superstițiilor» și nu se bagă de seamă ce capital spiritual e în acest folclor de credințe și sărbători, care poate și trebuie să fie întrebuințat în școală”, in Vasile Băncilă, *quoted work*, 2006b, p. 534.

³³⁹ „trebuie să privească atent și cu infinit respect la lumea tradițională a satelor noastre și la comorile de folclor, unde se păstrează zăcămintele de sărbătoare”, in *Ibidem*, p. 536.

this point of view, the “new” holidays invented today, such as “World Milk Day”³⁴⁰, are deprived of a treasure trove of holiday items. Therefore, their holiday potency is also limited.

It is not surprising that among the advice Vasile Băncilă offered regarding a good attitude towards the holiday was to know the calendar of traditional dates.

“(…) The customs and celebrations of the Romanian people are, one might say, oversaturated with festive meanings and dynamics. The teacher who ignores them commits a serious mistake both towards the educational work and towards our people. Teachers should be deeply and sympathetically acquainted with the calendar of dates, they will find here a real pedagogical goldmine and will serve the efflorescence of the true Romanian critical culture that we expect from the future”³⁴¹.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Vasile Băncilă’s work represents a still under-researched source for the sociological understanding of celebration, even though the philosopher developed his own sociological conception. This material represents a minor attempt to valorise sociologically the theoretical apparatus discovered by Vasile Băncilă on the problem of celebration.

We have observed that the “reception of the holiday”, on which depends on the joy that the festive time gives you, is directly proportional to the preparations that precede it. From this point of view, the absence of preparedness or the low level of preparedness is an indicator of the decline of the celebration.

Another indicator of decline is the loss or replacement of the meanings attached to the holiday by the community in the past. The “holiday potency” of the community increases if people act in accordance with those meanings that have stood the test of time.

These meanings are found in certain “places” called by Vasile Băncilă “treasure troves”, the most important of which is folklore. The Romanian philosopher deliberately chose the name “deposit” to emphasise that it was those festive meanings for which hundreds of generations have celebrated.

To summarise, “receptivity” means the harmonisation of the individual with the general meaning of the holiday (found in the specific moral-religious precepts,

³⁴⁰ The United Nations established June 1st as a public holiday in 2001, in Adevărul Staff, „Ce se mai sărbătorește de 1 Iunie: Ziua Mondială a Laptelui și Ziua Mondială a Părinților” [“What else to celebrate on June 1: World Milk Day and World Parents’ Day”], in *Adevărul*, June 1, 2024, Available at: <https://adevarul.ro/stildeviata/magazin/cesemaisarbatoresc-de-1-iunie-ziua-mondiala-a-2365442.html>, Accessed on April 30, 2025.

³⁴¹ „(…) datinile și sărbătorile poporului românesc sunt, s-ar putea spune, suprasaturate de înțelesuri și dinamisme festive. Învățătorul care le ignoră păcătuiește și față de opera educativă, și față de poporul nostru. Oamenii de școală trebuie să cunoască adânc și cu simpatie calendarul datinilor, vor găsi aici o adevărată mină pedagogică și vor servi eflorescența adevăratei culturi critice românești, pe care o așteptăm de la viitor”, in Vasile Băncilă, *quoted work*, 2006b, p. 533.

norms, values, customs, habits, etc.), which is possible if the individual has prepared himself (made some effort) before the festive manifestations begin. The specific moral-religious meanings of the holiday, meanings enjoyed for hundreds of generations, give the holiday its festive potency. Reception is much greater for holidays that have stood the test of time. We say that they have a high festive potential because they benefit from a spiritual capital rooted in the culture of the celebrating society, which Vasile Băncilă called the “treasure trove of holiday” (folklore being a good example of such capital).

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