CONTRIBUTIONS OF ROMANIAN THINKING TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract: Having as a support the specific traditional background and the pre-modern cultural forms within the regional perimeter, modern Romanian culture was formed through a complex process assimilating and adapting the currents of ideas, the values and institutions from Western Europe. The crystallization of the national consciousness and the consolidation of our cultural identity, through original creations in various fields, are phenomena that must be explained by the many-sided correlations between internal changes and external influences. Therefore, the cultural modernization process was carried through a twofold generative movement: the intellectual elites' aspiration to express the national spirit in modern shapes and their concurrent effort to assimilate languages, styles and ways of thinking specific of the European culture.

In this context, the issue of our cultural identity and the relationship between the national and the European was permanently on the agenda of Romanian thinking, generating various theoretical approaches and ideological attitudes. These themes gave rise, in the interwar period, to intense confrontations between the traditionalist and the modernist conceptions, between the autochthonous and the pro-Europeans outlooks. In this paper, I will briefly present some theories developed by Romanian thinkers about the theme of identity and dialogue between cultures.

Key words*: modernization, cultural identity, image, influences, stylistic matrix.*

The Process of Modernization and Construction of National Identity

The national idea is one of the pivotal ideas of modernity. It inspired large-scale social movements, which eventually led to the formation of nation-states, which became political organizational structures specific to the modern world. During the period of transition to modernity, nation and cultural identity issues were intensely problematized in the Romanian and the South-East European space. In this area, social movements oriented toward modernization were associated with national liberation movements from under the shell of the three empires (Ottoman, Russian and Austrian) which extended their existence until the First World War. The issues concerning state modernization were closely intertwined with national political imperative (the recognition of political rights, defense wars, independence wars and wars waged to achieve national unity). Romanian society had to muster energies and substantial resources in order to solve simultaneously national tasks and objectives on the agenda of social modernization. This combination of different strategic objectives represents a specific feature of the modernization process undertaken by the societies in the Eastern European area.

Modernization of Romanian society, the increased cultural and economic ties with the European space and the strengthened national identity are interrelated processes that interfered and supported each other. The three series of phenomena took place in parallel. In the Romanian case, modernization, in all areas, was inspired and supported by a large-scale process of assimilation of European ideas and cultural patterns. The main episodes of the modernization of the Romanian space correspond to significant moments in the process of national construction. More recent analyses distinguish a period of transition to modernity, until the early 19th century, then, after the foundation of the unitary Romanian state in 1859, "a phase of accelerated modernization", until the late 20th century, and "recent modernity after 1990" (Vlăsceanu, Hâncean, 2014, p. 27).

Looking back, we see that, as early as the 18yj century, the cultural factors played a catalytic role in the equation of our modernization. The broad movement of ideas known as "The Transylvanian School", in the Enlightenment lineage, contributed fundamentally to strengthen our national consciousness and managed to gradually establish in the political and intellectual circles a vigorous pro-European orientation. The program of modernization and national construction was carried on and enhanced by the representatives of the `1848 movement, who founded modern cultural institutions (in education, media, theater etc) and placed Romanian society irreversibly on the path of accelerated modernization. The 1848 generation was, indeed, a heroic generation, with outstanding performances on the building site of modernization. In a favorable geopolitical conjuncture to Western powers, the 1848 generation managed to change the direction of Romanians' historical orientation from East to West. This superlative statement belongs to Eugen Lovinescu, a writer, who in the interwar period, developed „a law on synchronism", according to which modern societies, first from within the European perimeter, embarked on a path of convergent evolution, under the modeling action of a „spirit of the age" and due to the increased interdependences among them. In Lovinescu's opinion, the 1848 representatives were the agents of our synchronization with Western ideas and models, so that, through their multilateral action, „the axis of political and cultural life switched from East to West; and so the axis of spiritual life will also be changed" (1997, p. 13).

The 1848 movement continued, on a different scale, by the group known as „Junimea", a movement of ideas that established a „new direction" in Romanian culture and a different outlook on modernization, fighting for an in-depth Europeanization of Romanian society. Titu Maiorescu, the leader of this movement, developed a sociological theory of „the forms without substance" and launched an ample critical action against „the empty forms", namely of those modern institutions taken over from the West, but which lacked an appropriate content within the Romanian space. Though this theory, Maiorescu conceptualized, on a theoretical level, the basic contradiction of Romanian society on its road toward modernization. Regarding the national identity, in agreement with the evolutionistic outlook of the time, the Junimea representatives were in favor of an organic historicism, considering that the nation has historical foundations in language, traditions and specific lifestyles, but she is a new form of organization, legitimized by a modern culture. Junimea representatives were, indeed, synchronic with the modern spirit, and Maiorescu stated that „the new direction" is characterized „by understanding the ideas that the entire humankind owes to Western civilization and also by preserving and even emphasizing the national element" (Maiorescu 1978, p.158). The „new direction" agents were marked, though their formation, by the spirit of German culture, being receptive to the idea of cultural difference

and originality. They put the openness toward Europe in conjunction, not in opposition, with „the emphasis on the national element".

The lesson conveyed by the Junimea had beneficial effects on Romanian culture and this became evident particularly in the interwar period. The fulfillment of the national goal by the Great Union of 1918 was a milestone in the history of Romania. The processes of political and economic modernization were boosted, while from the cultural standpoint, Romanian creators from various fields enriched substantially the value heritage of our nation, achieving outstanding performances, some having a universal significance. To sum up, in the modern period, Romanian thinkers were receptive to the issue of national identity, as a foreign researcher points out: „two ideas gave their thinking direction and cohesion: the nation and Europe" (Hitchins, 1996: p. 145). The national achievements and the modernization efforts, with all the inconsistencies of this process, gradually placed us within the „determinants of the European network", since we could not „develop as a state unless we integrated into Europe and accepted forms which were not often put to any test, but instead were cut with foreign scissors" (Blaga, 1985, p. 311). Situated on a „watershed land", as Blaga wrote, the Romanians built up their identity at the crossroads of different cultures, but they turned heliotropically, toward Western Europe, from an organic impulse, as some plants bend their stalk toward sunrays.

Different approaches on national identity

National identity is a relevant concept, with multiple levels of meaning, but it must be protected from substantialist and traditionalist approaches that make it to be so vulnerable from a theoretical standpoint. It is important to mention that collective identities have lasting, historically permanent elements; nonetheless, they are not frozen structures, instead they are configurations in the making, along with the evolution of the morphological components of societies. In the opinion of a knowledgeable researcher of the interwar period, „the agenda of Romanian sociology - and not only that – had at its forefront the national question, approached from different angles and with various theoretical and practical tools" (Dungaciu, 2003: p. 77). Thus, in this epoch the theories on Romanian identity differ therefore in the way they approach a series of relations, such as: tradition and modernity, European and national, unity and diversity, center and periphery, West and East. These relationships, in their variety and combination, make up the general geopolitical framework in which the Romanian thinkers placed their explanations and reflections on the issue of our cultural identity. The most significant cleavages concerned however the broad cultural and ideological currents, distributed along two main axes: traditionalism - modernism and nationalism - Europeanism.

The question of national identity is also present in the debate on the future of the European Union innovative project, an issue which occasions „a conflict of interpretations" not only in the academic and theoretical space, but also in the political and ideological one. German and French thinking established various meanings and images about the nation, which are also found in current approaches: *a) nation as a cultural and ethnic unity*, based on a common origin, on language, religion, culture, traditions, rituals, common lifestyles and *b) nation as a political and civic unity*, a political community of free citizens, equal in rights, regardless of their ethnic origin and social status. In the Romanian space, due to known historical circumstances, there prevailed the image of a nation as a cultural unit as compared to its image as a political unit. The

unity of language and culture was the fundamental support and the factor that fuelled the Romanians' aspiration towards independence and state unity.

The two ways to define the nation and the nation state (in ethnic and cultural terms vs. political, legal and civic terms) have important consequences for how to deal with the relationships between nationality and citizenship, nation and state, the policy towards minorities and immigrants, including the various projections of political groups towards the European Union future configuration. Nonetheless, the conceptions about nation also differ, function of the answer theorists give to the following question: Is the nation a perennial structure of history or is it just specific to modern societies? Starting from this criterion, Anthony Smith (2002, pp. 228-234) believes that we can delineate five outlooks or paradigms about nation and identity. Sharing relatively similar assumptions, *the perennialist and primordialist conceptions* consider that nations are rooted in primary anthropological data (kinship, language, territory, religion, traditions), being perennial structures of history that have continuity under the coating of various forms of political organization.

In exchange, *modernist conceptions* view nation as a recent political community, „built" by means of the specific processes to the modern era: industrialization, urbanization, unification of economic markets, unitary system of public education, the emergence and expansion of printing, the spread of media and books, the modern public sphere, the political system based on the idea of citizenship and representative democracy. *Postmodern outlooks* are more radical variants of modernism, which see nations only as „imagined" communities, cultural „artifacts", built through the efforts of modern political and intellectual elites. According to postmodern outlooks, globalization will „deconstruct" and break up modern nations, favoring the emergence of post-national community-type forms. Finally, *ethno-symbolist conceptions* view nations as modern structures, having a pre-modern ethnic support, so that „the symbolic heritage of ethnic identities" is reinterpreted and conveyed all along history through language, beliefs, symbols, myths, traditions, narratives and evocations that have the function of getting together national communities around and strategic objectives and ideals.

Modernist and postmodernist approaches consider that nations are communities doomed to disappear, as modern conditions that generated them will be fundamentally changed. To sum up, Smith believes that the standard theories are *perennialism* and *modernism*, with their various versions. Perennialism has a radical variant (primordialism) and a moderate one (ethno-symbolism). From modernism there have emerged two radical versions: constructivist conceptions and postmodernist conceptions. Therefore, nation attributes differ in the two standard paradigms:

Perennialism   *Modernism*

Cultural community...political community

Anthropological, ethnic, immemorial shock....................modern

Rooted in the past..created

Organic...mechanical

Unitary..divided

Defined by quality   ....defined by ressouces

With popular support..constructed by elites

Based on ascendency...based on communication

Perennial structure of history ....doomed to disappearence

(Schema adapted after Smith, 2002, p. 36).

Modernism is the dominant theory in the last five decades, having as exponents, among others, Ernest Gellner (1997), for the classic variant, Benedict Anderson (2001) and Eric Hobsbawam for the radical constructivist variant, wherefrom postmodern versions have emerged. The author I followed in this analysis says that „the study of nations and nationalism is pervaded by major theoretical and ideological schisms". These divergences are so accentuated that there are few chances that „a unified theory or a generally accepted paradigm" about ethnicity, nations and cultural identities may be developed. (Smith, 2002, p. 232)

The confrontation between identity paradigms in Romanian culture

By applying Anthony Smith's grid to Romanian culture, we come upon the five identity paradigms approached by Romanian thinkers in the past two centuries, with certain theoretical nuances and variations. For instance, the modernist paradigm is present in the minds of the 1848 revolutionists, but in combination with strong perennialist and ethno-symbolist elements (the interest in the origin of the people and its heroic past, in the recovery of the popular heritage, in the folklore, symbols, myth). Similarly, in the case of Junimea movement, prevailing is the modernist orientation traced out by Maiorescu, who emphasized the need to create a modern, genuine foundation for the forms imported from Western milieus. The modernist paradigm becomes predominant in the interwar period, when the processes of social modernization and cultural creation witness outstanding performances. Rationalist-type, pro-European thinkers illustrate the modernist approach to the issue of cultural identity. The best example is Eugen Lovinescu, a promoter of modernism in the literary movement and the author of a theory of „synchronism" by which he demonstrated that the Romanian nation was the outcome of political and institutional modernization processes, with the assistance of Western beneficial influences.

We can mention other illustrations of modernist authors in the field of social and philosophical thought, such as Dimitrie Gusti, P.P. Negulescu or Mihai Ralea. They shed light on the particular role played by historical and social factors in the "composition" of national identity and demonstrate that identity is changed along with the change in life conditions. Mihai Ralea, in his confrontation with traditionalist orientations („perennialist" we would say today) in the interwar period, argued that Romanian identity was still in the making, „it is not fully established, it is in the making" and would get a stronger outline along with the advance of the modernization process (1999, p. 68). Moreover, our identity would strengthen as the Europeanization process of Romanian society would move forward. „Starting by being good Europeans, we'll end up by being good Romanians. The conclusion? Romanianism is learned through Europeanism" (Ralea, 1997: 151). Historical contexts have changed, but Ralea's statement acquires these days a special resonance. From the new generation of thinkers who asserted themselves in the interwar period, Emil Cioran deserves a special mention for his violently anti-traditionalist attitude. He emphatically demanded the detachment from the unworthy past, the quest into Romania's national specificity „which kept it for a thousand of years inactive, in order to be able to eliminate it together with the ridiculous pride that we attach to it" (Cioran, 1998, p. 62).

Another important name from the gallery of modernist paradigm is sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, who developed a valuable sociological system and established a new research method of social reality, namely the monographic method. Together with multidisciplinary teams from the

Bucharest Sociological School, Gusti launched an extensive village research program; nonetheless his program also included the research on cities, public entities and institutions, with the view to underpinning the social reforms necessary for the modernization process. Thus, as a result of the field research, Gusti hoped to obtain a synthetic image of the nation, the integrating social unity, so that sociology becomes, in its attempt to explain a modern society as a whole, the sociology of the nation, „a science of the nation". By projecting the national idea over the modern history, Gusti argues that at the end of World War I „the final victory of the national principle" took place: „The old state, always aggressive and conquering, based, within and without, on the simple brutal power, died, and the new state, based on an idea, on the national and democratic idea, replaced it". Thus „a new Europe was born", writes Gusti, a Europe that dissolved the „antithesis between nation and state (...), creating a synthesis: the national state, a new political idea" (Gusti, 1970, pp. 10 -11). Therefore, the Europe of modern nations was born as the Europe of empires collapsed.

Extending a little the referential framework, we see that the Romanian thinkers were more attached to the perennialist and the ethno-symbolist approaches than to the modernist one. However, in-between the two approaches there was an ongoing dialogue, which often took the form of clashes of ideas, so that the perennialist approaches took over some elements from the register of modernist conceptions and the other way round. We can enlist in the sphere of perennialist conceptions those who view nation as a cultural and ethnic unity, those who focus on language, on ethnic and historical roots, on the system of beliefs, values and attitudes that define a nation's specific lifestyle.

The Romanian thinker with the most consistent „perennialist" outlook is Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), an author who, relying on his personal studies on the history of culture, developed the concept of „stylistic matrix", a concept similar to that of "cultural pattern" in American anthropology. The main factors forming the stylistic matrix are spatial and temporal horizons, prevailing axiological accents, meanings attributed to nature, time, history and human destiny, preference for certain values and expressive symbols in the order of creation (Blaga, 1985, pp. 179-180). In the Romanian author's outlook, the factors that confer identity to a culture are „abysmal" factors, rooted in the deep structures of the collective unconscious, factors to be imprinted on all cultural creations (art, religion, science, philosophy, mythology, symbols), in combination with certain factors related to the creator's personality. For Blaga, a nation's cultural identity is shaped by a set of spiritual predispositions and lasting factors which cross historical epochs and act in a manner similar to Kant's *a priori* structures in the knowledge process.

Where is the action of natural, historical and social factors? Blaga discussed about these factors only as marginal considerations. He speaks of a „stylistic apriorism" of cultures, meaning that a stylistic matrix, once crystallized into fundamental lines, is expressed both in the languages of pre-modern popular culture, and also in forms that belong to modern culture. The sociologists from Gusti's School, attached to the modernist paradigm of the nation, reproached to Blaga, rightfully, that he placed the stylistic matrix into a metaphysical area, which cannot be controlled by empirical research methods, being designed as a frozen structure, with no becoming. To answer this charge, Blaga replaced in his last works the term of stylistic matrix for „stylistic field", trying to explain how the conditions of modern life act on creative forms and inevitably change also the stylistic structure of cultures.

The perennialist category also comprises the theorists who consider that the core of national identity is shaped by the *religious factor*, which then is reflected upon elements that grant specificity to a culture. Thus, Nichifor Crainc (1889-1972) believes that our spiritual and mental structure is modeled by Orthodoxy and is radically different from the Western one, marked by Catholicism and Protestantism. Embarked on a traditionalist and autochtonist direction, Crainic also develops theological arguments to support his identity paradigm. Orthodoxy, he writes, is observant of „the language and ethnic individuality of each nation", whereas Catholicism is guided by a standardizing spirit, a rigid centralism. Therefore, for Orthodoxy, „nations are various units of the created nature" and the church „shapes its forms on the national corpus". „Catholicism (...) universalizes what is local, while Orthodoxy localizes what is universal" (1997, p. 51).

Language is another *perennial factor* of identity, coming from ancient times, a factor characterized by stability, with slow changes, like geographical conditions. Romanian thinkers conferred upon language a crucial role in our identity equation, and some of them, such as Mircea Vulcănescu and Constantin Noica, endeavored to decipher, in line with the theses of linguistic relativism, the Romanian vision on the world, analyzing words, phrases and specific structures of Romanian language. The identity of a people is expressed in „the pattern of language", where it can be deciphered through a complex linguistic, historical, hermeneutic and philosophic research. In this regard, we have to mention a Blaga's statement: „In every language there is an implicit metaphysics" (1977, p. 180).

Finally, a brief reference to postmodernist outlooks, which emerged within the Romanian space after the anti-communist revolution, a quarter of a century ago. Essentialist approaches were replaced by the relativistic ones, focusing on communication networks and the media *image of identity*. Nonetheless, for postmodern approaches, there is not „the truth of facts", only the interpretations built on the account of the facts, according to ideological and cultural contexts and depending on the „observation point" taken by the historian or the philosopher who produces that interpretation. If we accept the thesis that „political and ideological pluralism inevitably translates into historiographical pluralism" (Boia, 1997, p. 6) we take an extreme relativistic perspective and finally, we come to cancel the scientific nature of history. The idea that the nation can be seen as „an imagined political community" (Anderson, 2000) is historically documented and is also true in the Romanian case. Proceeding in similar ways with the actions carried out in Western cultures, the 19th c. Romanian elite built up the *image* of the Romanian nation through numerous historical and literary, scholarly or popular narratives, through political speeches, through the appeal to the mythical representations of the past, through symbols and artistic forms. The nation image is a cultural construction that has changed over time, but which has played, throughout time, a major role in cementing social cohesion, gradually becoming an element of collective imaginary.

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