UDC 341.217(4)

A. Antoci Associate Professor of Department Social and Humanitan Science
N. Scobioală University Lecturer of Department Social and Humanitan Science
Agrarian University of Moldova

„EUROPEAN CULTURE" WITHIN THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCING IDENTITY

Identity is an ambiguous and slippery term. It has been used-and perhaps overused-in many different contexts and for many different purposes, particularly in recent years. As we shall see, there are some diverse assumptions about what identity is, and about its relevance to our understanding of its meaning.

The fundamental paradox of identity is inherent in the term itself. From the Latin root *idem*, meaning "the same," the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference.

On the one hand, identity is something unique to each of us that we assume is more or less consistent (and hence the same) over time. For instance, as we write, there was an intense debate in the U.K. about the government's proposed introduction of identity cards and their potential for addressing the problem of "identity theft." In these formulations, our identity is something we uniquely possess: it is what distinguishes us from other people. Yet on the other hand, identity also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. When we talk about national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for example, we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people. Here, identity is about *identification* with others whom we assume are similar to us (if not exactly the same), at least in some significant ways.

Much of the debate around identity derives from the tensions between these two aspects. I may struggle to "*be myself*" or to "*find my true self,"* and there are many would-be experts and authorities who claim to be able to help me to do this. Yet I also seek multiple identifications with others, on the basis of social, cultural, and biological characteristics, as well as shared values, personal histories, and interests. On one level, I am the product of my unique personal biography. Yet who I am (or who I think I am) varies according to who I am with, the social situations in which I find myself, and the motivations I may have at the time, although I am by no means entirely free to choose how I am defined.

An explicit concern with questions of identity is not a novel development, although it has undoubtedly taken on a new urgency in the contemporary world [1]. Identity is not merely a matter of playful experimentation or "personal growth": it is also about the life-or-death struggles for self-determination that are currently being waged in so many parts of the world.

According to the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, the new prominence that is accorded to identity is a reflection of the fact that it is becoming ever more problematic [2]. Globalization, the decline of the welfare state, increasing social mobility, greater flexibility in employment, insecurity in personal relationships-all these developments are contributing to a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, in which the traditional resources for identity formation are no longer so straightforward or so easily available. Like many contemporary authors, Bauman emphasizes the fluidity of identity, seeing it as almost infinitely negotiable, and in the process perhaps underestimates the continuing importance of routine and stability. Nevertheless, his general point is well taken: "identity" only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way and needs to be explicitly asserted.

1.1. ACCOUNTING FOR IDENTITIES

Within the human sciences, several disciplinary specializations have laid claim to identity. The most obvious distinction here is between psychological and sociological approaches, but a whole range of subdisciplines and intellectual paradigms-developmental psychology, social theory,

symbolic interactionism, cultural studies, and many others-have also sought to generate definitive accounts.

There is a large and diverse body of work within sociology, social psychology, and anthropology concerned with the relations between individual and group identities [3]. Researchers have studied how people categorize or label themselves and others, how they identify as members of particular groups; how a sense of group belonging or "community" is developed and maintained, and how groups discriminate against outsiders; how the boundaries between groups operate, and how groups relate to each other; and how institutions define and organize identities. These processes operate at both social and individual levels: individuals may make claims about their identity (for example, by asserting affiliation with other members of a group), but those claims need to be recognized by others. In seeking to define their identity, people attempt to assert their individuality, but also to join with others, and they work to sustain their sense of status or self-esteem in doing so. As a result, the formation of identity often involves a process of stereotyping or "cognitive simplification" that allows people to distinguish easily between self and other, and to define themselves and their group in positive ways.

Drawing on this approach, Richard Jenkins argues that social identity should be seen not so much as a fixed possession, but as a social process, in which the individual and the social are inextricably related [4]. Individual selfhood is a social phenomenon, but the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals. As such, identity is a fluid, contingent matter-it is something we accomplish practically through our ongoing interactions and negotiations with other people. In this respect, it might be more appropriate to talk about *identification* rather than *identity*. One classic example of this approach is Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, first published in the late 1950s [5]. Goffman provides what he calls a "dramaturgical" account of social interaction as a kind of theatrical performance. Individuals seek to create impressions on others that will enable them to achieve their goals ("impression management"), and they may join or collude with others to create collaborative performances in doing so. Goffman distinguishes here between "*front-stage*" and "*back-stage*" behavior. When they are"*on stage*," for example in a workplace or in a social gathering, the individuals tend to conform to standardized definitions of the situation and of their individual role within it, playing out a kind of ritual. "*Back stage*", they have the opportunity to be more honest: the impressions created while on stage may be directly contradicted, and the team of performers may disagree with each other.

Critics have argued that Goffman tends to overstate the importance of rules and to neglect the aspects of improvisation, or indeed sheer habit, which characterize everyday social interaction. More significantly, he suggests that "*back-stage*" behavior is somehow more authentic, or closer to the truth of the individual's real identity, which appears to imply that "*front-stage*" behavior is somehow less sincere or less honest. This could be seen to neglect the extent to which *all* social interaction is a kind of performance. Like some other researchers in this tradition, Goffman sometimes appears to make a problematic distinction between *personal* identity and *social* identity, as though collective identifications or performances were somehow separate from individual ones, which are necessarily more "truthful."[6].

2. EUROPEAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

In a famous lecture in Vienna in May 1935, Husserl asserted that Europe could not be geographically defined, because Europe encompasses a unity of life. It is a spiritual creation, with all sorts of objectives, interests, worries and problems, which are related to ideological formations, to institutions and to organizations [7]. Husserl added that within these societies, individuals act at several different levels: families, tribes, nations, whose aim it are to become one spiritual entity.

The Frenchman Julien Benda [8] indicated that Europe cannot be the result of a mere economic transformation, nor of a mere political process. Europe will not 'really' exist, as long as it does not adopt a certain system of moral and ethical values.

According to Jorge Semprún, present-day Europe was born out of the fight and resistance against Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms. He points out that the process of European integration is combined with the explosion of national, regional, and local identities.

In summary, from one perspective, the main European trait is located at the supranational level, but from another perspective, we see the assertion of a multitude of identities.

Another point of view was formulated by Joseph Rovan [9], who believed that Europe is a cultural and economic community, with a certain common history. But because Europe is not a nation, it does not possess either a common language or a territory.

Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande [10] consider that Europe should be conceived as:

a) An open political project;

b)With the political principles of democratic stability, market economy and the application of a regulatory framework;

c) A combination of an internal process conforming to national interests and promoted by supranational institutions, and an external process which obliges Europe to take up an outside-position – Beck and Grande mention the cases of Iraq and Turkey. In their opinion, this explains the difficulty of conceiving Europe with respect to its homogeneous cultural traits;

d) A singular and different process, especially in comparison to the formation of the national states, as Europe's identity formation has been a dynamic and open process.

The overview of these different positions again illustrates the complexity of the concept **"Europe".** In the next part we will have a closer look at what is understood by European culture.

The French journalist, Jean Daniel, who is one of the founders and director of *Le Nouvel Observateur* (1988, in *Le Monde)* says that the main aim of Western cultural identity is to protect human rights [11] The European cultural identity is built on the capacity to reconcile moral idealism and political realism, within a market economy and in a world filled with conflicts and forms of competition. But here we would like to add that it is difficult to articulate a substantial European identity project merely on the basis of values and principles, and that it remains necessary to construct an identity based on a common history, which is recognized by the European citizens themselves.

Biedenkopf et al. [12] believe that the European identity is the object of a negotiation between the European peoples and their institutions. The European Union and its citizens should act in such a way that values remain the basis of the common European identity, within a context that is always evolving.

We shall end this chapter by referring to Philip Schlesinger [13], who again points to the considerable diversity in Europe, and to the evidence that not one nation can become the core of Europe. He asserts that if we prefer the supranational model, the possibility of constructing a European identity within the European Union becomes rather slim. But he also recognizes the continued and powerful appeal of national identities as they are articulated by the states of EU. We must admit – he says – that the official national identities remain persistent sources of potential contradictions with a putative EU identity. Another level of contradictions is based on the existence of strong nationalisms, which in practice means that, for instance, Catalonia, Euskadi or Scotland hope that the road to Brussels will allow bypassing Madrid and London. It leads to the conclusion that Europe is simultaneously undergoing processes of centralization and fragmentation, which only adds to its complexity.

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

We are convinced that this repertoire of viewpoints on Europe, from a variety of approaches, provides us with sufficient evidence of the complexity of Europe. This overview has introduced so many different viewpoints that it becomes practically impossible to summarize all contributions. A careful reading of this paper, with all its different perspectives may be a useful starting point from which to gain some understanding of what is really meant by the word Europe.

Bibliography

[1]. *Richard Jenkins - Social Identity, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2004.*

[2]. *Zygmunt Bauman – Identity, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004.*

[3]. *Henri Tajfel - Human Groups and Social Categories, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams -Social Identifications, London: Routledge, 1988); Anthony Cohen - Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity, London: Routledge, 1994.*

[4]. *Richard Jenkins - Social Identity, 2nd Edition, London: Routledge, 2004.*

[5]. *Erving Goffman - The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, New York: Anchor Books, 1959.*

[6]. *Simon Williams, Appraising Goffman, British Journal of Sociology, 37, no. 3, 1986, pp. 348–369, and the special issue of Sociological Perspectives 39, no. 3 ,1996.*

*[**7**]. Semprún, J. - Pensar en Europa, Barcelona: Tusquets editor, 2006.*

*[**8**]. Benda, J. - Discours à la nation européenne, Paris: Idées Gallimard, 1993/1979.*

*[**9**]. Rovan, J. - Europe des patries ou Nation Europe, Peter Koslowski (ed.) Imaginer l'Europe. Le marché européen comme tâche culturelle et économique. Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1992, pp.62-79.*

*[**10**]. Beck, U., Grande, E. La Europa cosmopolita, Sociedad política en la segunda modernidad (<translation of Das kosmopolitische Europa>. Barcelona: Paidos, 2006).*

[11]. *Daniel, J. - Quelle culture pour l'Europe?, Paris: Le Monde, December 30–31, 1988.*

[12]. *Biedenkopf, K, Geremek, B., Michalski. K., Rocard, M. - La dimensión cultural y espiritual de Europa, Barcelona: La Vanguardia, December 5, 2004.*

[13]. *Schlesinger, P."Europeanness" – A new cultural battlefield', Innovation in Social Sciences Research 5(2), 1992, pp 11-23.*