

# THE FORMATION OF IDENTITIES IN-BETWEEN THE “TWO EUROPES”: A ROMANIAN CASE

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Mihai FIFOR

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If till the beginning of the 90's Europe seemed to be have been clearly divided between a West defined by the globalization process and an East frozen somewhere in traditionalism, the social phenomena arisen together with the debut of the ninth decade determined, at least at first sight, the removal of the West/East barriers. The result shocked, the new state of things proving, if necessary, the huge fracture between two types of societies, a post-industrial one, delimited by modernism, post-modernism, post-industrial productions and post-nostalgia and the other one, confused by the social and cultural shock generated by the falling through of an existence's evaluation system based on the traditionalist pattern of the *community*, all together with everything it implies. Hence, a massive identity crisis and the organic need to re-create some constructions, even if imaginary ones, which could offer something in exchange in the relationship with the modernism and the globalization it has brought about. Hence the exacerbation of nationalism and the rediscovery of the ethnic group as a distinct social-cultural unit opposing the nation-state.

Confronted with all these issues, the western theorists suggested as a background for the anthropological analysis of the new phenomena the redefinition of the western paradigm of the modernism as a new “great” tradition as well as the explanation of the non-western variants as fusion and conflicts with other traditions. This is how “the problem of world history appears in a new light. At its core is no longer the evolution and devolution of world systems, but the tense, ongoing interaction of forces promoting global integration and forces recreating local autonomy”<sup>1</sup> or “of the tension between cultural homogenization and heterogeneity”<sup>2</sup>.

The anthropologist who studies these areas of the society will certainly be concerned with the formation and transformation of identities in the globalization context and with the various phenomena arising during this ample process. Yet, in order to understand it, we need to understand the elements that form the equation, mainly what modernism and globalization mean and especially how the community defines itself in regard to this challenge. Can we talk about the opposition modernism/traditionalism, global/local? And if we can, then where does the Romanian rural community place itself?

The modern evolution tendency of humanity is obviously that of globalization, unquestionable evidence that need no demonstration. Globalization understood as the crystallization of the whole world into a single entity must be seen only as a frame within whose limits the fundamental mutations brought by modernism take place. On the other hand, globalization is by no means synonymous with homogenization but “it should rather be understood as a new framework of differentiation. Robertson stresses the need to include individuals, societies, relations between societies and (in the generic sense) mankind as the major contemporary components or dimensions of the global-human condition and he draws attention to the global valorization of particular identities which are part of the overall process of globalization. Among the identities that are thus reinforced and reoriented by the global context, civilizational complexes and traditions are not the least important.”<sup>3</sup> To understand community, therefore, a break has to be made with an intellectual tradition which was shaped by our nineteenth-century forebears and which associated community with a disappearing world of traditional solidarities and values. “The current ignorance or suspicion of debates concerning globalization [...] parallels those earlier celebrations of community in opposition to modern society”<sup>4</sup>.

As we have already showed if the West starts to gradually accommodate itself with the new concept and with the new order, the southeastern European countries find themselves under pressure again. This pressure can be felt at the social group level and even at the individual's who can hardly stand the anxiety of loosing the group identity in exchange for the not comfortable at all statute of an European fellow, member of a globalize “community”. As a

consequence he takes refuge in a rather closed than opened social system and that is why the community, a social system itself, tends to 'close up' forming in its turn a 'world', a global micro-context with its own functional mechanisms. 'Localism' thus becomes 'globalism'. Hence the phenomenon of sub- or counter-globalization centered on localism, on community and eventually on nation or nation-state.

This is how the relativisation of the modernism's image is reached, globalization being the frame inside where tensions and conflicts of tradition are being reactivated. The modern concept of culture functions in a constant tension between particular and universal. And globalization has a dramatic impact on this tension. "And the synthesis of tradition and modernity should be seen as a matrix of further changes, rather than a stable model..."<sup>5</sup> The presence and continuous re-activation of tradition inside the modernism is thus admitted.

If regarding the existence of tradition inside modernism things seem to clarify, let us then try to see to what extent the concept of 'community' can be re-defined.

The concept of community in its classic sense of shared values and identity and thus of a shared culture has been applied literally on the localism. The result is a somehow final opposition between globalism as an integrative phenomenon and localism as a synonym for 'community', as a counter-acculturation phenomenon. But this comes as a contradiction to the idea of diversity clearly mirrored in the structures of modernism. That is why "the connotations of solidity and homogeneity attaching to the notion of community, whether concentrated in a local or dispersed has been replaced in the framework of modernity by the idea that the situated production of identity [...] does not depend alone, or even always primarily, on the observable, concentrated activities within a particular locale or diaspora. The identity of anyone or any group is simultaneously produced in many different locales of activity by many different agents for many different purposes"<sup>6</sup>.

How do we delimit then the concept of community in connection with the new tendencies and which is the role played by tradition in the context of a globalized community?

The villages have always been the location of the idea of community. Their inhabitants periodically reproduce social networks. In studying the localism one of the most important methods was the constructivism that had a rather methodological force of impact than a theoretical one. Thus, for the beginning it attacks the ideas according to which identity is gained in a natural way being produced by an individual act of will. But the most important aspect is that of the criticism of the 'essentialist' notions which claimed that an individual can have unique integral identities all together harmonious and non-generative of deep problems.<sup>7</sup> The social norms, the economic needs and the traditions of several generations (collective representations) generate a sense of community. This is how an established geographical place (a village, for example) expresses both social and temporal relationship. Doreen Masey called this bi-directional process of identity a double articulation. There are thus many virtual connections to be made between the discussion about the place identity and the debate about the personal identity. Chantal Mouffe wrote: "Many members of the community seem to believe that we belong to a single community, empirically and even geographically defined and that that community might be united by a single idea that of a common good. But, in fact we are always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities (as many as the social relations we take part in and the subjects' position they define), constructed by a variety of discourses precariously and temporarily stitched up at the crossroads of these positions" (1988:44).

More than that, if places are conceptualized as points of articulation for the construction of the notion of identity and take into consideration the construction of the subjects' identity inside of them, which actually leads to the recreation of the place itself, then the identity of the place is a double articulation following the *subject-place-subject* pattern.

On the other hand, the reconstruction of traditions and identities can now be understood only in connection with the globalization process. For we should not forget that "national identities and nationalistic perspectives can become the starting point for different interpretation of the global situation; together with different civilizational traditions and conflicting currents in modern culture, they thus lend to the tendential singularity of the globalizing process a plurality of meanings"<sup>8</sup>.

Thus globalization neither is nor should it be understood as the risk of losing identity, and tradition, in its turn, should not be understood as the main coordinate to read the localism as defined by means of community. Globalization imposes the re-inventing of tradition as a natural phenomenon in this process, the only regulating tool for the tensions and the mentalities of some individuals daily pressed by a continuously and rapidly transforming society. The re-modeled tradition places the individual in new cultural patterns and helps him re-invent his identity as a participant to an open system, regain his stability and safety in the rocking of a permanently moving world.

This is why one of the most recent challenges for the Romanian anthropologist is, undoubtedly, the discovery of a new distinctive socio-cultural entity that manifests itself almost aggressively, struggling to impose (and with success we have to admit) its own mentality patterns in a less and less coherent world that is Romania at the turn of the century. This entity, ignored not long ago, is the working neighborhood in the great urban agglomeration.

If in the USA the effects of urbanization have been felt since the beginning of the 20's, forcing the sociologists and the anthropologists to the thorough study of this phenomenon as an immediate reality with special social implications, not the same thing can be said about the Romanian specialists who somehow seem to be overwhelmed by the situation generated by the new reality after 1989.

Incidentally, the facts hasten and as if out of the blue a new cultural product boomed on the media market: the *neighborhood culture* as it pompously has been labeled by TV stations seeking the sensational and which have excessively promoted and commercialized it. This allowed questions to arise and also made room for the need of some specialized answers. For, going beyond the sensational aspect of such cultural products, we have to underline the fact that they have brought out real problems of an ignored world that tend to become identity marks for a larger and larger social category. But media productions “the lines between the realistic and fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experience of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world”<sup>9</sup>.

Yet, one of the great ‘victories’ of the communism in Romania was, undoubtedly, the creation of the ‘new man’, constructor of communism, of the multilateral developed society, meant to accomplish great strategies, result of an Utopian ideology. There would have been nothing special about this, hadn’t all been just propaganda and the projects simple aberrations put down on paper. The problem arises only when in our attempt to decode the *neighborhood culture* we realize that the utopia has become reality, that the neighborhood culture’s social actors are nothing else but *hybrid individuals*, neither villagers, nor townsmen, neither workers, nor farmers, ‘new men’ results of a totally unsuccessful communist experiment. I am perfectly aware that we can easily be accused of being pathetic or of having a science-fiction perception of reality but the analysis of facts proves exactly the opposite.

The 50’s and the 60’s in Romania see a massive migration of population from the rural to urban areas, mainly caused by the elimination of private property in the rural area because of the forced collectivization, but above all the mirage of a better life in the new industrial town<sup>10</sup>. Thus, through an excessive pressure on an otherwise natural process (for the rural-urban migration is not a communist invention) a large and forced mutation of population with long term social implications was practically made. In an extremely short period of time great urban agglomerations develop around some pre-industrial towns, the administrative framework for the new type of society being the working neighborhood.

Observing in the beginning the concentric area model of drawing the town by placing the new wave of population in the outskirts usually in those areas with cheaper dwellings and not far from the place of work, this marks the first stage in the apparition of the Romanian industrial town. The second stage follows and it is delimited by the chain migration phenomenon that will lead to the continuous development of the working area. This phenomenon is generated by the relatives’ and friends’ presence in the town. These individuals can be asked for help in the moment of the emigrants’ arrival in search for a new dwelling and a job. A pattern is thus created according to which a friends’ and relatives’ network is transferred in time from the village to the town. The result is the formation of a small and homogenous community inside the community, the town.

Together with the urban agglomeration the transition from the concentric area model to the multi-nucleic model is made. Chauncey Harris and Edward L. Ullman propose in 1945 this model of urban expansion starting from the idea that the modern industrial towns don’t have only one center but many nuclei around which the existence of the individuals is organized. The neighborhood is thus delimited as a distinct social entity having its own nucleus of formation with its own cultural mechanism—a liminal space between a world of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

Up to 1989 this type of organization had nothing distinctive, the administrative and political centralized coordination creating the illusion of homogenization at the level of the town. But in the period of time that followed, an extremely agitated one and rich in social and political shocks, the working neighborhood becomes the area which most acutely experiences the changes in the economic and politic reality with immediate influences on the social and cultural level. The neighborhood concentrates now the largest number of unemployed and low educated population and obviously the highest degree of social tensions. If the natural evolution of the urban agglomeration, namely the working neighborhood has somehow been artificially stopped by inducing a false feeling of job security and trust in the system’s ability to efficiently control the accumulation of social tensions, the post-December ‘89 moment marks the sudden acceleration of this reality’s dynamics of evolution. This is how the unemployed worker arrived years ago from the village because his land had been taken over by the state, becomes again the small land owner in the rural area and practise the so-called ‘week-end’ farming and being separated again from an environment (the adoption one) to be propelled towards his origin environment. And although the circle seems to close, the *hybrid* individual does not leave his present environment that has become unsafe and with no immediate perspectives to the familiar environment benefit. He struggles to regain his land, sometimes taking part in endless trials, but the percentage of those who actually return to the countryside is so insignificant that we really cannot talk about a revert process.

This individual has no longer been able to define an identity in the village, the departure environment—the fracture on the temporal axis is already too evident. The former villager feels and delimits his identity as a citizen but the city has never entirely adopted him, at least in the case of the first generation of emigrants’, while the rural area becomes a less and less familiar place, therefore a strange one. The second generation, in its turn, being born in the adoption environment does not harmonize with either of the systems which make up the frame of reference for its existence. Its representative is the inhabitant of the neighborhood and he considers it as his unique reference point of identification in the relationship with the Others. The neighborhood, as a social entity closes up, the cultural fracture center/outskirts becoming more than obvious. All these are nothing but effects of urbanization and of globalization as we shall see further on.

An interesting point in our study is to see how urbanization has worked at the social group's level generating structural changes mirrored by the individual's mentality.

Ferdinand Tomies described the process of urbanization as the passage from *gemeinschaft* (a community based on kinship connections) to *gesellschaft* (community based on common interests). Durkheim reached the same conclusion: the small rural communities were tied up by relationship based on a shared culture and common experience while the urban communities were tied up by relationship based on the interdependence of individuals who carried out specialized task<sup>11</sup>.

The urban emigrant is forced to adapt to a lot of stimuli defined as *psychic overload*<sup>12</sup>, the most common way to do that being that of becoming calculated and emotionally distant. Hence the apparition of the *adaptation-accommodation* formula. In its more conservative meaning this formula negotiates the simultaneity of the cultural homogenization and diversification in any kind of community by preserving the power of the basic framework made up of notions as sub-culture, tradition and structure.

Also talking in her essay *Urbanism as a lifestyle* about the identity formation of the rural emigrant and of the social forces that act on him, Louis Wirth considered that the first psychological effect of the urban life is the weakening of the individual's connections with the rest of the people. Because of the lack of close relationship with friends and relatives, specific in the origin environment, the new citizen breaks loose from the restraints that kept him from involving in anti-social behavior.

This is the very moment when the transplanted individual starts to feel the cultural shock, a specific phenomenon for any type of migration, be it from a country to another or from rural to urban areas.

So, the outskirts neighborhood constitutes a liminal transitional space, a passage for specific groups from a status to another, towards a new cultural and social environment. The breaking up with the original environment creates a major problem that of loosing the initial identity and the necessity of its re-construction in the new environment. The individual will seek for a new identification reference points, spatial-temporal ones at first, then socio-cultural ones.

The massive mutation of population from the rural area also meant the dislocation of an ample cultural segment followed by its translation to a new social environment. It is hard to assume that the individual who left the village for the city has abandoned his cultural heritage to adopt a new cultural model. It is natural for the acculturation process to appear, this time between the rural and urban culture. The cultural systems in contact lead to the apparition of a interference culture, a hybrid one specific to the new space developed on the outskirts of the pre-industrial town. This culture is what we use to define through the sintagm 'neighborhood culture'.

Getting back to the hybrid individual's relationship with the society, we should say that their weakening modifies the type of social contact in as much as to annihilate it and to produce *anomie* or the disappearance of the norms. The new generation of the neighborhood tends to delimit its area, its territory, to transform it into a closed one precisely because of the imperative need to spatially delimit the anguish of the identity's loss. The individual belonging to the *neighborhood culture* builds himself his own identity by means of a violent reference to a fully chaotic reality of the social system. Making use of the vacuum background of this system or even of that one of an extremely slow evolution, the media promotes the imported model of the ghetto culture, of rap, techno, hip-hop culture, cultural model that perfectly suits the needs of self-identification of a whole generation.

It is, after all, difficult enough for the specialist when analyzing the *neighborhood culture* to discern whether we have to do with an artificial construction, an undertaken model or a happily 'marriage' of the two variants. Anyway, this cultural trend offers a solution under the circumstances in which it is extremely difficult to build yourself a social identity.

Therefore, the *neighborhood culture* does exist for each and every social system has its own cultural component part, just as the *neighborhood boy* does exist as the social actor of this system. "Mike Featherstone in his introduction to the collection *Global Culture* (1990) speculates about the possibility of a global culture, the existence of 'third cultures', and trans-societal cultural processes, all of which challenge lazy associations [...] of culture and territoriality. Globalizing processes have raised to the forefront of our thought experiences of borders, 'multi-culturalism' within a locality..."<sup>13</sup>.

The association we make with such hypothesis may seem more than far-fetched for the socio-cultural segment our study analysis. But let us 'read' the third culture as one formed, consciously or not, in-between two great cultures already well defined: the rural and the urban one. This might also become a point for discussion mainly if we really can talk about distinct urban and rural cultures in the case of Romania. We won't debate on it here. Instead of that we shall discuss about a pluralism of cultural segments and especially about the sub-culture understood as "a subdivision of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence and religious affiliation, *but forming in their combination a functioning unit which has an integrated impact on the participant individuals*"<sup>14</sup>.

In its first phase this culture was dominated by the cultural implant brought by the rural emigrant from the origin environment. The second phase is dominated by the undertaken of a cultural model and its adaptation to the *neighborhood boy's* needs. The model will tend to gradually become, through successive transformations, an autochthonous specific to the neighborhood cultural type, a sub-culture.

Let us not forget another very important element. When the big cities influence the culture and the institutions of an entire society there are not any longer places which can be considered completely rural. In exchange many sociologists

talk about a rural-urban continuum where the urban features diminish according to the distance from the town and the rural ones according to the proximity to it.

The neighborhood cultural product, covering at the narrative level a very important segment of a reality characterized by chaos and by a crisis of the sphere of values, by an identity crisis, has been rapidly undertaken in the rural area too, area that is faced with the same problems at least at the level of the young generation who 'created' this product. The rural-urban continuum functions two-ways, the sub-culture proving itself to be for the moment a reliable element for both environments, vigorous enough because of the message it transmits.

#### NOTE

1. George Marcus, *Past, present and emergent identities: requirements for ethnographies of late twentieth-century modernity worldwide*, in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (ed.) *Modernity and Identity*, Blackwell, 1992, p. 309.
2. Martin Albrow, John Eade, Jorg Durrschmidt and Neil Washbourne, *The impact of globalization on sociological concepts*, in John Eade (ed.), *Living the global city*, London, New York, 1997, p.29.
3. Johann P. Arnason, *Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, in Mike Featherstone (ed.) *Global Culture*, SAGE Publications, 1993, p. 224.
4. Martin Albrow, *The impact...*, p. 24.
5. Johann P. Arnason, *Nationalism, Globalization...*, p. 226
6. George Marcus, *Past, present...*, p. 315.
7. Apud Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Blackwell, 1994, p.13.
8. Johann P. Arnason, *Nationalism, Globalization...*, p. 225.
9. Arjun Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy in Modernity at Large*, Public Worlds, vol. I, University of Minnesota Press, p. 35.
10. An important thing to be mentioned here in order to make things easier to understand would be that the Romanian rural society of the 50's was still of a traditional type having all the major features of such a community. On the other hand the main Romanian towns, excepting maybe Bucharest, the capital, and few towns in Transilvania built up by the Sacks (the German ethnic minority) such as Sighisoara, Sibiu, Brasov, and by the Hungarians, like Cluj Napoca or Timisoara and which followed the western medieval model of a 'burg', the rest of the towns were in fact some sort of boroughs where the great boyars came to spend the winter. This is why we cannot talk about an urban culture in such boroughs that in fact were dominated by the same traditional culture maybe a bit adapted for the boyars cultural needs.
11. William Kornblum, *Sociology in a Changing world*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1988, p. 550.
12. Stanley Milgram, quoted in William Kornblum, *Sociology...*, p. 550.
13. Martin Albrow..., *The impact...*, p.28.
14. Ibidem, p. 26.