

# THE IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE WITHIN THE INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS ESTABLISHED IN THEATERS OF OPERATIONS

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*Identity, a self-defining feature in relation with others, represents one of the standpoints when studying intercultural relationships within the theatres of operations. Military personnel participating in different missions in these theatres are characterized by markers of ascribed identity. The Romanian military personnel participating in international missions cannot be only characterized by their ethnic identity as long as one's identity is multiple and reflects the relationship(s) established with various social and professional groups. Unfortunately, despite the depreciation of the ascribed identity role in comparison with the optional identity role, transnational organizations do not represent a landmark for the identity of Romanians in general, and of Romanian military, in particular. Moreover, the optional identity contributes to alienation and self-closing, and not to the strengthening of relations with the military group assumed to be the group of belonging.*

**Key words:** *cultures, identity, intercultural relationships, theatres of operations, group*

## 1. INTRODUCTION. THE CULTURAL IDENTITY ISSUE

The issue of cultural identity takes into account the possibility of cultural configuration/reconfiguration. In an attempt to outline different definitions of culture, starting with those identified by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1954/1978) and continuing with the classification of these definitions by different cultural categories included in Jencks' studies (1993:7-24), Margareta Boacă (2009:63) notices that the general outlook on culture is

that of a social category. This aspect is relevant in terms of achieving the intercultural standpoint between individuals and distinct communities within the theatres of operations and in terms of switching from “culture” (the singular form), as a term defining a general reality, to “cultures” (the plural form), a term that reflects the specificity, uniqueness and coherence of each cultural space. This perspective, also called in terms that are more restrictive “the social perspective”, represents the basis of our investigation in the substantiation

of the necessary instruments that come from distinct disciplinary areas like sociology, anthropology or social studies and is not a limitative one. On the contrary, it represents a way of highlighting the links between disciplines belonging to wider fields, in a manner similar to the interdisciplinary alliance prefigured by Cicourel (apud Mattelart & Mattelart, 2004:115). Within this wide and fluctuant disciplinary field, and within the specific domain of our research, namely intercultural communication, the issue of switching from culture (the singular form) to cultures (the plural form) becomes relevant. In the context of the actual cross-cultural dynamics and of the trends to abandon the physical boundaries of the social framework, as in the case of the theaters of operations, the mentioned issue becomes more relevant.

The identity issue has deep roots. Even if in the contemporary context identity is understood as a mark of profound transformations in society, the individual dimension of identity must not be abandoned. This dimension represents the ground that feeds the entire construct of identity. Identity designates a substitutable characteristic of persons (or objects, phenomena, events, statements) in real or projected plan (Larousse, 2006:554). Moreover, identity consists in the manner in which one defines as himself (Mathews, apud Boacă, 2009:128). This perspective is deeply rooted in the Hegelian conception of identity revelation regarding the antithetical relation

with the other that leads to self-identification by resorting to the absolute self-consciousness as a landmark. The persons' identity could take at least one of the forms: the biological identity, the belonging of the individual to the human species; the psychological identity, highlighted by the hereditary inheritance, bearing the mark of the family; and the socio-cultural identity, defined by the elements that determine the specificity of the social and cultural frame to which an individual belongs.

## **2. THE CULTURAL IDENTITY ISSUE WITHIN THE THEATRES OF OPERATIONS**

From the perspective of the factors that determine the nature of intercultural relationships established during the peacekeeping operations, the third dimension (the socio-cultural) is the one that represents the defining frame of identity. This dimension is conditioned by the biological and psychological dimensions of identity; therefore, the approach should aim the inter-dimensional interpretation, not the separation required by the deconstructivist approach. The pluri- and trans-dimensional brings into question the Freudian perspective, in accordance with which the need of identity defines the man. The way of development is narcissistic. Under the pressure of Eros and Thanatos the ego as a psychical instance, the manager of identity in the contact with the exterior is, in the end, perceived as itself.

*“Moreover, this identity becomes object of transaction and imitation; identity is “borrowed” in a superior stage of imitation, i.e. of similar answering reaction from the exterior, comparative with an observed pattern. This transaction of identity becomes a manner of social learning and involves more than simple imitation: the contagiousness, which is the basis of the group identity formation. In this manner, the birth culture marks our identity. The specific genetic dowry and the access to education represent the prerequisites for the development of human identity. The same processes take place in the construction of individual and collective identity”.* (Lesenciuc *et al.*, 2010:134-135).

The necessary differentiation that needs to be done when it comes to identity delineation, respectively emphasizing the aggressiveness/hostility in the process of configuring the identity, thrusts into the limelight the intergroup, racial and national differences as explained through the libido concept (Freud, 1951:37-38). The latter highlights the narcissistic attitude of groups characterized by the preoccupation for self and native and by the rejection of the allogeneic (especially when the Others’ attitudes contradict the narcissistic opinion about self). The perception is not determined by the identification of common elements, but it is marked by differences, even if the “Cain and Abel syndrome” is present (*i.e.* if the probability of hostility is high in the conditions in which the differences between groups are low, then the relationship is closer (apud Boacă,

2009:129)). In this respect, we can take into account the third dimension of identity, the socio-cultural one, which leads to group formation and, implicitly, to group identity. Freud analyzes the factors suggested by Le Bon in relation with the the fear of isolation and the contagiousness, all of which are seen as easy to be established, but hard to explain: “they must be included among those phenomena of a hypnotic order” (Freud, 1951:10).

From the perspective of the reports drawn up during the peacekeeping operations, the complex problem of identity is related to the fact that the identity matrix is built within a cultural framework. As such, the cultural borders are enforced through certain differentiating elements - markers of identity- that are inherited: the language, the nationality, the religion, a certain social class, certain communication patterns, diverse habits and norms that regulate everyday life. These characteristics that imply minimum control and enough conscientious influence concerning each of the individuals could not be overridden by our behavior or by our own Weltanschauung. This form of identity that is as a mark of culture contains characteristics that are less under control. However, it targets the set of adequate interpretation, confers a form of identity designated by Giddens (1991:105) through the phrase “ascribed identity”.

When approaching the identity issue during peacekeeping operations in relation with the group (military group, in this case) one can observe

a twofold tendency: on one hand, a differentiation and fragmentation process that characterizes the relationship between the group and its outsiders/exterior, and on the other hand a process of self-organization. Therefore, we conclude that, in defining his own identity, the individual within the group is exposed to different pressures that come from the relationship to be established with different identities on various levels. Whatever the predominant or the reference level is, the differences in perception lead to shaping and highlighting the particularities that are often under the influence of the type of relationship experienced with the exterior in terms of cultural identity forming. Let us notice that individual identity does not imply a clear limit, a state in a particular frame reported to others, a relation with a specific group, but it involves a series of successive and relative stages between the individual identity and the anthropological identity of the species. One of these intermediary stages is the ethnical stage, ethnicity being the natural and legitimate state of each nation. National identity can therefore be seen as an intermediary stage in a pattern of identities which includes, as its limits, the individual identity and the species identity. In this case, the problem of national identity is the one that will have the strongest impact in indentifying the factors which determine the nature of intercultural relations established within the theatres of operations.

National identity, approached in the context of cultural and political

identities' superposition, represents a synthesis of cultural, social, political, and economic features accomplished through the comprehension/internalization of the set of cultural and common moral values. Such a synthesis can be compared to the unfastened links between tangible entities (individuals) on one hand, and between tangible entities (individuals) and abstract entities (the nation) on the other hand.

### **3. ROMANIAN IDENTITY. CHALLENGES CHARACTERISTIC OF THEATRES OF OPERATIONS**

The Romanian ethno-type has its basis on a common symbolical heritage, but a heritage which has set apart the engagement in politics and the reflection upon its role and meaning. This orientation, which apparently is one towards the interior, towards the one's self, stems from the unfastened link with space and not with time. As a result, it provides the Romanian individual with a set of successive closings understood as the consolidation of his own system of values, or more precisely as "closings within opening" (Noica) and involving the enrichment of Being, defined by means of the encompassing adverb "homely" and through the extension towards new spaces translated holographically into one's own being. "Home/homely" triggers cultural identity and its meaning is derived from Havel's concentric closings intents: from the planetary level (the species' identity) to the individual level (the ego's level), that is the core

around which the proximity of the birthplace, of the region, of the country entwines (apud Brumaru, 2001:194-195). These circles, these meanings of “home/homely” and the inherent stages of the identity as described by Georgiu (Georgiu, 1997:77) represent the object of our study. Thereby, the national identity problem, as an intermediary stage in the Havel-Georgiu structure of defining elements and brought up into discussion is only one cultural facet.

The cultural problem resulting from the cooperation/competition relations between different nations’ representatives dates back much further than the establishment dates of global (transnational) organizations such as UN, ECSO, NATO, EU, etc. Therefore, we cannot assess it by only referring to such organizations. The issue of national/cultural identity in transnational organizations is identical to the issue of strengthening the role of society within community. Thus, such a simile reveals an obvious tendency to ignore ethnical identity, to diminish the role of a group’s identity in favor of personal identity. In 1990 Stuart Hall noted: *“There are no natural links which bind humans together; people are responsible for their own bonds, craftsmen of their own connections”* (Hall, 1990:228). From this point of view, cultural identity is no longer an assigned/pre-established identity, but a matter of personal choice, and thus based on elements chosen by the individual in accordance with his predilections and personal options. As a result, in an era when all cultural resources are

available, the risks for of an individual to make random choices or to resort to the “cultural” products insistently offered by the media are omnipresent and that is a direct consequence of the absence of a frame of reference and system of values. The ever increasing number of possible choices to be made leads only to despair in front of countless options. This kind of identity is temporary, perishable, fragile, because it has no basis, no durability, no appreciation.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The presence of the Romanian officers in peacekeeping operations should be analyzed from the identity perspective suggested by this article. Thus, they are both representatives of the Romanian society, of their own communities, and of the international organizations coordinating the activity within the theatres of operations. As such, they are from the very beginning “fighters” for their own cultural identity. Such a perspective on identity leads us to Young’s statement underlining that *“just as community collapses, identity is invented”* (apud Bauman, 2001:11) and which points out the following paradoxes: the community paradox and the identity paradox. These two are actually the ones that come at play and have a say in the positions assumed by any Romanian officer deployed in theatres of operations. Mention should be made that the Romanian officer’s ethno-psychological profile is not substantially different from the Romanian ethno-type given the

differences that are more of nuance than of essence. As such, entering a swirling movement, this officer is expected to choose (often intuitively) the middle way between acting as a community representative characterized by a certain cultural identity, or as the representative of society characterized by a personal “mark”. Furthermore, under the protection of this fragile balance, throughout a volatile area of operations, he must put the efficient communication card on the table. Intercultural communication, which must be institutionally developed in terms of competence, has the role of diminishing the perception, representation and projection disequilibrium, but also the role of providing a certain opening, facilitating relationship development and collaboration, allowing for the tuning of social mechanisms, for the growth of collective solidarity, for the reconciliation and the redefinition of identity, etc.

Taking into account the lack of a curriculum on intercultural communication, the aim of our research is to investigate the extent to which the power of communication – a distinctive Romanian feature – occurs in the absence of a common educational framework at national level. Thereby, we conclude that the process of sorting out the factors, which determine the nature of intercultural relationships established during peacekeeping operations, is not limited to an enumeration, but implies the identification of the means by which these factors are activated during the participation of the Romanian officers to peacekeeping operations.

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