THE PARADOX OF „WHITE, CHRISTIAN AND RATIONAL"

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Introduction

The dream of European unity is very old. In the eighteenth century it was called the „City of Lights" („Europe as a large Paris") and then, in time, syntagmas become more diverse: the Common Home, the European Community or the European Union. This old dream, increasingly shaped from a political and economic point of view, is now more and more disputed in terms of the European sciences united under the unmistakable label of „Kulturwissenschaften". These sciences question not only the possibility of such a huge construction but also its legitimacy. One of the most controversial issues is related to the cultural „foundation" of the new construction: is there a European „us", except the circumstantial economic and political interests? In other words, can we speak about a European „identity" or we shall rather speak about a process of „identification" in a floating manner only?

Postmodernism - a new „definition of reality"

To answer the question above, first of all we have to describe the theoretical frame. The borders of such a contradictory *Weltanschauung* or intellectual current known as *post - modernism* are difficult to draw. There are authors[1] who consider that *post - modernism* refers only to fulfilling the modern perspective, pushing it to the last consequences. Therefore, syntagmas like *fluid modernity* or *late modernity*[2] would be more appropriate to describe their vision. Other authors[3] suggest a radical epistemic rupture

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[1] See for instance: Cârtărescu, M. 1999, Postmodernismul romanesc, Humanitas, București or Vatimo, G., 1993, Sfârșitul modernității, Pontica, Constanța.

[2] Bauman, Z., 2001, Modernitatea lichidă, Antet: unmentioned city.

[3] See for instance: Lyotard, J. - F., 1985/1993, Condiția postmodernă, Babel, București; Lyotard, J. - F., 1997, Postmodernismul pe înțelesul copiilor, Biblioteca Apostrof: Cluj - Napoca; Rorty, R., 1984, 'Habermas and Lyotard on Post - Modernity', in Praxis International, 4, pp. 32-44; Rorty, R. 1989/ 1998, Contingență, ironie și solidaritate, All: București.

with the Enlightenment project, a deconstruction of scenarios, narratives and meta-narratives born on the ideological soil of modernity for now more than three hundred years. The fact is that the dominant voices are those who claim rupture, using constantly the prefix *post*: *post*-modernity, *post*-thought era, *post*-deontic era, *post*-historical, *post*-industrial or *post*-humanist era.

Micro and nanotechnology, digital technology and media explosion are identified as key elements in transforming the modern *Lebenswelt*: through television, computers and virtual social networks, today everything „tends to flatten on the plane of contemporaneity and simultaneity."[4] This simultaneity of entire history through media of communication is one of the most important features of the postmodern world. Two other traits we are specifically interested in: *experimentalism* which generates fusion of form and languages in open and discontinuous structures; *antinomianism* understood as simultaneous presence of contradictory ideas, expressions and trends. They „explode" in the countercultures, movements of emancipation, oriental philosophies or mysticism[5]. This perpetual „contemporaneity" will lead to the dissolution of historical science, be it about the philosophy of history or practical historiography, as Vatimo wrote.

„The flattening of time" will gradually lead to the „flattening" of subject and existence: a future in which no unified view of the world is any longer legitimate and desirable; in which *ephemerality* and *insecurity* will be felt more acutely and the subject will „dissolve" himself inside of illusory, fictional and utopian worlds. Thus, he will lose the sense of reality, time and history. This is what Vattimo called *disinsertion*.

Even the postmodern science will have these traits. Modern science tried to order the universe by imposing to reality some models of intelligibility, or metanarratives such Marxism, Freudianism and the „hermeneutics of meaning". But the transformations that have affected the rules of science, letters and arts since the late century reject the globalising paradigms. Instead, J.F.Lyotard[6] argued that postmodern knowledge „refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our capacity to bear the immeasurable." It also „finds its reason for being in the para-logics of inventors". If the narrative knowledge was linked to the idea of inner balance and „conviviality", now consensus is no longer desirable because disagreements seems to be the main source of innovation and dynamism.

Modern Europe - Postmodern Europe

In his extraordinary book *European thought in the eighteenth - century*, Paul Hazard[7] describes the spirit of modern Europe, with his policy vision close to utopia at the time, and the identity-building struggles of its peoples.

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4   Vatimo, G. (1993), Sfârşitul modernităţii, Pontica: Constanţa, p. 14.
5   Hassan, I. (1990), 'Pluralism in Posmodern Perspective' in Exploring Postmodernism, Crlinescu & Fokkema (coord), John Benjamins Publishing Company: Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 17-39.
6   Lyotard, J. F. (1985/1993), Condiţia postmodernă, Babel: Bucureşti, pp17-25, 103.
7   Hazard, P. (1981), Gândirea europeană în secolul al XVIII - lea, Univers: Bucureşti, pp. 420-446.

So what is Europe?

1. „A kind of great republic divided into several states, some monarchical, others mixed, first aristocratic, last popular; but all communicating with each other, all with the same religious background, all having the same principles of public law and policy (...)" wrote Voltaire in the XVIII century.

2. Neighbouring peoples who are fighting with fury. Wars between neighbors or within borders. Agreements are only short armistices.

3. A contradictory form, strict and uncertain at the same time. Borders pushed forward, backward, suppressed, restored: „Europe is composed of forms which it declares intangible while touches them constantly."

4. Land of jealousy, bitterness and resentment: „ Latin peoples despise Germans, massive bodies, rude temperaments, slow spirits; Germans despise Latins, tired and corrupt; Latins quarrel among themselves; you could say they suffer when faced with the recognition of the merits of neighboring nations: the first thing that comes to their mind are always the defects"[8]. Or: „flowers, as soon as they become symbols of nations, cease to be beautiful and fragrant: the scent of Italian flowers is too strong and intoxicating; the scent of flowers in France, although they are mottled, bright and alive, is weak and non-persistent; flowers from Germany or from the north, have little, or no smell at all; and when they have, it is ugly"[9].

5. When talking about each other, the Europeans added a „but" after enumerated qualities as if they wanted to cancel their effect: „It is said that the French are polite, skilled, generous *but* irascible and fickle; Germans are honest, hard-working, *but* slow and too attracted to wine; Italians are agreeable, fine, pleasant to talk with, *but* jealous and traitors; Spanish are mysterious and cautious, *but* braggarts and formalist; English are brave to temerity, *but* vainglorious, disdainful and proud to ferocity ..."[10]

6. A thought eternally unsatisfied that constantly seeks two things: one is the happiness, the other is the truth: „it has just found a mental state seeming able to respond to this double demand and soon realise that holds only the provisional, the relative, and even these are not mastered with firmness; and then the European thought restart its desperate search which is its glory and its pain."[11]

I will use this six points scheme, which I have synthesised from Hazard's book, to try to broadly draw the portrait of contemporary, postmodern Europe. This way, we can see more clearly how the cultural and political perception evolved (or reshaped) until today:

1. We can also say, as Voltaire did, that Europe is today a kind of „great republic" divided into several states, but „all communicating with each other, all with the same religious background, all having the same principles of public law and policy." A significant

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[8]   Spectator, no. 55 cited in Hazard, 1981, p. 420.

[9]   Spectator, no. 55 cited in Hazard, 1981, p. 420.

[10] Moreri (1981), Historic Dictionary, art. 'Europe', cited in Hazard, p. 421.

[11] Hazard (1981), p. 446.

part of this „cultural republic" from today, is organised as European Union. Formally, the Union is not difficult to be defined: a transnational organisation that initially rested on three pillars: security and foreign policy, justice and internal affairs and economic market, all in common. But at the same time, the Union is difficult to be defined in other respects:

- it is „a site, a historic experiment, with many weak points, but, nonetheless, a crucial project for the post-modern era we live in"; it is completely original, different from any past or present model of federation or confederation; in fact, it is neither a federation nor a con-federation; it is less and more than a sum of states.[12]

- it is „an extended neo-imperial formula", a „postmodern empire" because its parts are admitted by their own request, and everything is subject to negotiation and compromise; this cooperative formula ensures the long-term legitimacy.[13]

2. There are peaceful neighbouring peoples, but nations are „about to fall apart," as Cooper argued. Wars will be no more among the neighbouring states but possibly between larger or smaller groups, within some perfect permeable borders. Also, they will not take the classic form but will be new forms of confrontations. The peace agreements among groups will be only brief armistices.

3. A contradictory form, strict and uncertain at the same time: strict in economic, political and administrative terms, uncertain in geographical and cultural terms.

4. Land of jealousy, bitterness and resentment but also of prosperity and political freedom. The cooperative behavior will prevail at the level of large structures such as governments, international institutions or large, private organisations, while competition will prevail at the micro level.

5. When talking to each Other and about each Other during modernity, people were building their national identities. In other words, they were building their identitary differences in a common framework: the Greek, Latin and Christian inheritance. This is kind of an in-group differentiation. This process is recognised in the first article of the Constitutional Treaty that states that the EU will respect and preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity as a guarantor of creativity and as a base for spiritual health.

At the same time, a more reflective and open to the world, a more empathic and imaginative Self looks like is about to be born. Of course, the construction of Self has always been a dialogic process of opening and closing, of returning to the past and projection into the future, but we can hear some voices arguing that we should abandon the past and the „European fixations" connected with:

- Christianity, Roman law and the rationality of the Enlightenment; they shall no longer be claimed as foundational values of Europe, being only simple romantic narratives,

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[12] Georgiu, G. & Carlan, A. (2007), 'The cultural dimension of European Integration' in Globalisation and Policies of Development, Dobrescu, P., Țăranu, A., Bârgăoanu, A. (eds), comunicare.ro: Bucharest, pp. 109-117.

[13] Cooper, R. (2003/2007), Ordine si haos in secolul XXI. Destramarea natiunilor, Univers Enciclopedic: unmentioned city.

reactionary myths, which can only separate: „the idea is seen as embodying the cultural practices of Whites, Christians, reasoning in European style[14]."

- „Europeanness of Europeans": the construction of „new Europe" cannot start from „Europeanness of Europeans" but needs another imaginary of belonging to this space marked by mobility and transience, a space of a „happy hybridisation" which implies total openness to foreigners[15].

This great enterprise will succeed only if „homeland cultural identities „were deconstructed in order to „destabilise" the nationalist imaginary in whose name Europe „is demonising and persecuting foreigners". The „racist and xenophobic spirit is trans-European"[16]. This harsh indictment of „whites, Christians, reasoning European style" tends to transform some markers of identity in stigmata of shame. Those who meets the three characteristics would do well to feel guilty for all the sins of civilisation.

6. A thought eternally unsatisfied that constantly seeks two things: one is the *freedom*, the other is *prosperity*. It has just found an equlibrium seeming able to respond to this double demand and then „restart its desperate search which is its glory and its pain."

Final Remarks: Everybody knows: „The Mayor of London is a Muslim!" Why is this news? There must be lots of Muslims Mayors in the world... It is news just because the „Europeanness of Europeans" made it possible. This is the paradox of „white, Christian and rational".

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[15] Amin, A. op. cit., p. 8.

[16] Amin, A. op. cit., p. 9.

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