

## POSTMODERNITY AND THE IDENTITY CRISES

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### ABSTRACT

*Postmodernity is characterized by the liquefaction (Z. Bauman) of social and individual structures. Identity, as the trace left by belonging to communities such as family, neighborhood, or church, the last root of the individual caught in the flows of social (professional, economic, or spatial) mobility – becomes in turn a construct, a process, shaped by personal choices and decisions. Inventionism speaks of the set of identity tools that a person can use to paint an image, a self, or a convenient identity adapted to their temporary goals. Psychology has taken on the task of monitoring a person's capacity to identify, their personality's plasticity; politics determines the resources that may contribute to identification. Yet, people are still unaccustomed to their cultural emancipation. Initially diagnosed as resistance, rigidity, or difficulty in giving up a designated role within a total institution such as the army, the identity crisis was later associated by Erik Erikson with the age at which individuals assume their first significant decisions – the beginning of maturity, or in psychological terms, adolescence. Today, identity crises – understood as disorientation, lack of assumption, or absence of designated cultural roles – have spread across all ages, intensifying at moments of social status changing. Under conditions of extreme social fluidity and instability, the identity crisis can become a permanent feature of the postmodern personality's psychic structure.*

**Keywords:** postmodernity, fluid society, identity crisis.

### 1. POSTMODERNISM AND FLUIDITY

Postmodernity is a combination of flows, currents, trends, and processes – openings without closure, progress without limits, and opportunities without fulfillment. Its most accurate description is the liquefaction of the solid forms of premodernity and modernity. Traditional communities and premodern social structures – family, village, neighborhood, church – are “zombified”, in the words of Ulrich Beck<sup>106</sup>, representing stubborn survivals that are more likely to crumble

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<sup>106</sup> The German sociologist, author of the phrases “second modernity” and “risk society”, spoke in an interview given to J. Rutherford in 1999 about communities that are neither alive (since their survival is not permitted), nor dead (since they resist assassination), the so-called *zombie* institutions: „Vă întrebați ce este de fapt o familie în zilele noastre? Ce înseamnă ea? Există, desigur, copiii, copiii mei, copiii noștri. Dar chiar și calitatea de părinte, esența vieții de familie, începe să se dezintegreze în condițiile divorțului (...) Bunicii și bunicii sunt incluși și excluși fără niciun mijloc de a participa la deciziile fiilor și fiicelor. Din punctul de vedere al nepoților lor, semnificația bunicii trebuie determinată prin decizii și opțiuni individuale.” [“Are you wondering what a family actually is these days? What does it mean? There are, of course, children, my children, our children. But even parenthood, the essence of family life, is beginning to disintegrate in the face of divorce (...) Grandparents are included and excluded with no means of participating in the decisions of their sons and daughters. From the point of view of their grandchildren, the significance of grandparents must be determined by individual decisions and choices.”], in Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernitatea lichidă* [Liquid Modernity], Bucharest, Antet Publishing House, 2000, p. 9.

into rubble, marring the built landscape of contemporary society, rather than dissolving into perverse fluids (both in the sociological sense of Raymond Boudon<sup>107</sup> and in the literal sense of the term). The concrete and steel structures of modernity are, in turn, contested: “organizational cultures” replace the cold, alien rigidity of institutions that once controlled and sustained society.

Postmodernity appears as a world that is no longer ordered nor governed; visible leaders, publicly endorsed as such, are sustained by institutions, partners, and networks whose functioning may maintain, propel, or disable them. Leadership, power, and *auctoritas* are themselves too fluid to be clearly identified. Well-being, protection, and even life are increasingly individualized and contestable decisions. The right to individual happiness replaces the common good, which shifts the anxiety generated by the precariousness inherent in the fluidity of life outside the political sphere that now guarantees only the right to choose; individuals are urged to mobilize their own resources for survival, dignity, or growth. Order is guaranteed only through individual participation and achievement (civic and political), internalized not in the form of normality (as in the community, where the validity of the norm was grounded in its longevity and in the traditional integration of normality), but in the form of individual interest. Individuals are voluntary social units, no longer summoned to conform to a prefabricated order, as in modernity, but to advance their own interests in preserving rules; the violation of the rule triggers “self-inflicted harm”. “It is in our own interest” to conform. Norms are replaced by 1) the fear of falling behind and 2) the desire that seeks satisfaction<sup>108</sup>.

Fear, the endemic anxiety arising from “the impossibility of reflecting upon such an enormous multiplicity of options”<sup>109</sup>, contributes to this condition. Daniel Cohen’s research in 1998<sup>110</sup> has shown that employees are dominated by “frustration, isolation, competition”<sup>111</sup>, as well as by the depression of failing to meet the high standards set by their colleagues and to deserve the trust of their employers. Robert Linhart<sup>112</sup> further observes that individual autonomy and

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<sup>107</sup> Raymond Boudon, *Effets pervers et ordre social [Perverse Effects and Social Change]*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1977.

<sup>108</sup> Konrad Lorenz, *Cele opt păcate capitale ale omenirii civilizate [Civilised Man’s Eight Deadly Sins]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2007, pp. 34–51.

<sup>109</sup> „imposibilitatea de a reflecta asupra unei asemenea multiplicități enorme de opțiuni”, in Jacques Ellul, *Métamorphose du bourgeois [Metamorphosis of the bourgeoisie]*, Paris, La Table Ronde Publishing House, 1998, p. 81, p. 91, p. 94, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *Comunitatea [Community]*, Bucharest, Antet Publishing House, 2001, p. 97.

<sup>110</sup> Daniel Cohen, *Bogăția lumii, sărăcia națiunilor [The wealth of the world, the poverty of nations]*, Paris, Flammarion Publishing House, 1998, p. 31, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2001, p. 95.

<sup>111</sup> „frustrare, izolare, competiție”, in Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 95.

<sup>112</sup> Daniele Linhart and Robert Linhart, “The Evolution of the Organization of Labor”, in *Viewpoint Magazine*, December 5, 2022, Available at: <https://viewpointmag.com/2022/12/05/theevolutionoftheorganization-of-labor-1998>, Accessed on September 14, 2025.

initiative come at the cost of suffering, distress, weakness, helplessness, stress, and fear. Other studies identify as additional sources of insecurity unemployment or the uncertainty of long-term employment, uncertain prospects for old age, and the contingencies of urban life.

The desire for immediate gratification is the button that marketing – whether commercial, political, or spiritual – presses in order to provide us with the feeling of consumerist fulfillment. Gilles Lipovetsky<sup>113</sup> identifies in the consumption practices of postmodernity the tendency to commodify every dimension of life, producing a new relationship of the individual with objects, with others, and with the self, a perceptual form and a way of thinking mediated by the logic of consumerism. Zygmunt Bauman, in turn, interprets this liberation of choices – of purchasing, consuming, and self-identification through consumption – as one of the harshest and most perverse forms of servitude:

“In a consumer society, everything is a matter of choice, except the obligation to choose – an obligation which turns into dependence and thus ceases to be perceived as an obligation. (...) If shopping means scanning the assortment of possibilities, examining, touching, feeling, handling the displayed items, comparing their prices with the contents of the wallet or with the credit limit of the card, putting some in the cart and returning others to the shelf – then we shop outside stores just as much as inside them; we shop on the streets and at home, at work and on holiday, awake and in dreams. Whatever we do and whatever name we attach to our activity, it is a way of shopping, an activity modeled on the act of purchasing. The code in which our life politics is written derives from the practice of shopping”<sup>114</sup>.

Identity becomes yet another kind of acquisition: one can find, readily available on the market, a self-fashioned according to one’s desire.

“We can learn how to appear as a modern, carefree woman, as a reasonable and attentive wife, as a powerful magnate full of self-confidence, as a pleasant friend, or as any mixture of all of these together!”<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, *Fericirea paradoxală [The paradoxical happiness – Essay on hyperconsumption society]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> „Într-o societate de consum, totul este o problemă de alegere, cu excepția obligației de a alege – obligație care se transformă în dependență și deci nu mai este percepută ca obligație. (...) Dacă a cumpăra înseamnă a scana sortimentele de posibilități, a examina, a atinge, a simți, a manipula lucrurile expuse, a compara prețurile lor cu conținutul portofelului sau cu limita de creditare a cărții de credit, a pune o parte din ele în coș și o parte la loc în raft – atunci cumpărăm în afara magazinelor la fel de mult ca și în interiorul lor; cumpărăm pe străzi și acasă, la lucru și în vacanță, treji și în vis. Indiferent ce facem și indiferent ce nume atașăm activității noastre, ea este un mod de a face cumpărături, o activitate modelată asemănător cumpărării. Codul în care este scrisă politica noastră de viață derivă din practica cumpărăturilor”, in Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 70.

<sup>115</sup> „Putem învăța cum să apărem ca o femeie modernă, liberă și fără griji, ca o soție rezonabilă și plină de atenție, ca un magnat puternic, plin de încredere în sine, ca un amic plăcut, sau orice amestec din toate astea la un loc!”, in Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May, *Gândirea sociologică [Thinking Sociologically]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2008, p. 123.

## 2. ANOTHER REVOLUTION, ANOTHER LIBERATION, ANOTHER CRISIS

Freedom is the same as detachment, escape, and emancipation from both premodern communities and modern society alike; it is a form of indifference. Herbert Marcuse noted that what postmodernity proposes constitutes

“an unprecedented situation in history, for today we must liberate ourselves from a powerful, wealthy society, which is relatively well-functioning (...)”<sup>116</sup>.

Freedom becomes – how else? – a process of balancing and a meeting point between desires, imagination, and action; it is achieved either by increasing the capacity to act or by diminishing desires and imagination. Perhaps the masses did not desire such emancipation (see the myth of Circe’s pigs); for this reason, postmodern currents speak of the sources of “aversion” toward freedom:

1. people are not prepared for freedom, or
2. people do not believe in the benefits of freedom.

The notion is far from Émile Durkheim’s modern definition of freedom. According to his ideas, freedom in society is precisely the norm; in its absence, or in the absence of society, freedom itself cannot exist. Revolting against the norm leads to indecision, insecurity, anomie, and fear. Richard Sennett (1998) observes:

“Let us imagine a life of momentary impulses, of short-term actions, devoid of habits to sustain it, a life without routines; it would mean imagining a truly foolish life”<sup>117</sup>.

Alain Touraine (1998), in turn, adds that relinquishing solidity, and the conception of the human and the social as solid structures, signifies

“the end of defining the human being as a social being, defined by one’s place in society, a place that determines one’s behavior and actions”<sup>118</sup>.

The new individualism is one in which the individual constructs social action not according to norms, institutions, or stable principles, but according to their

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<sup>116</sup> „o situație inedită în istorie, căci astăzi trebuie să ne eliberăm de o societate puternică, bogată, în stare relativ bună de funcționare (...)”, in Herbert Marcuse, „Liberation from the affluent society” [„Eliberarea de societatea bogată”], in Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (coord.), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, London, Routledge Publishing House, 1989, p. 277, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> „Să ne închipuim o viață de impulsuri de moment, de acțiuni pe termen scurt, lipsită de obișnuințe care să o susțină, o viață fără obiceiuri; ar însemna să ne închipuim o viață într-adevăr stupidă”, in Richard Sennett, *Erodarea caracterului: consecințele personale ale muncii în capitalismul nou* [*Character erosion: the personal consequences of working under new capitalism*], New York, W.W. Norton&Company Publishing House, 1998, p. 23, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 23.

<sup>118</sup> „sfârșitul definirii ființei umane ca ființă socială, definită prin propriul său loc în societate, loc cei îi determină comportamentul și acțiunile”, in Alain Touraine, “Can we live together, equal and different?”, in *European Journal of Social Theory*, No. 1/1998, p. 177, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 24.

psychological specificity. It is a form in which, although critical thinking is encouraged, it manifests in the absence of judgment; its expressions are unrestrained, yet devoid of consequences. Cornelius Castoriadis warns that contemporary society is one in which people no longer ask questions but are inundated with answers<sup>119</sup>; permeability to ideology does not decrease but seems to increase<sup>120</sup> alongside the level of “accessed” information.

In modernity, individualization means the human escape from the community. In postmodernity, individualization signifies the establishment of a formal, *de jure* autonomy, based on identity self-construction, the task of “becoming who you truly are” (or “the best version of yourself”, as in the well-known national program for cultivating future generations, *România Educată* [*Educated Romania*]):

“The success of schooling is assessed by the extent to which, upon reaching adulthood, each individual is able to realize the best version of themselves at that stage in life and, in doing so, can articulate an answer to the question: ‘What kind of person am I, and in what ways can I contribute meaningfully within a globalized society?’”<sup>121</sup>.

This loss of form, the inconsistency of the social sphere, naturally contaminates individuality as well. In the Freudian explanation, the human being is constructed as an interaction between two opposing drives, the life drive and the death drive; its balance is unstable and possible only through “specialized assistance” (the psychopathology of everyday life). From a psycho-sociological perspective, however, the death drive is not opposed to the life drive, but is involved in its failure, serving as its limitation. Aggression, in biological-ethological or psycho-sociological explanations, can be interpreted as a way of claiming recognition. The specifically human aspect of vital drives is not what ensures our survival under all conditions (which we share with animals), but what reveals us as incomplete individuals, social human beings; they compel us to survive socially, that is, to be recognized by others<sup>122</sup>.

But the psychoanalytic explanation establishes the fundamental instability of human nature, the precariousness of consciousness, and the danger of the unconscious. Between these cardinal points of imbalance, the search for an identity

<sup>119</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, “Le delabrement de l’Occident” [“The decline of the West”], in *Esprit*, No. 177/1991, quoted by Zygmunt Bauman, quoted work, 2000, pp. 212–215.

<sup>120</sup> Konrad Lorenz, quoted work, pp. 88–110.

<sup>121</sup> „Succesul școlii este măsurat după modul în care fiecare copil ajuns la vârsta maturității se regăsește în cea mai bună variantă a sa la momentul respectiv și are implicit răspunsul la întrebarea: «Ce fel de om sunt, unde sunt bun în societatea globalizată (...)»?”, in Ministerul Educației Naționale [Ministry of National Education], „Educația ne unește. Viziune asupra viitorului educației în România” [“Education Unites: A Strategic Vision for the Future of Romania’s Education”], in *Ministry of National Education*, 2019, Available at: <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Educatia%20ne%20unește%20Viziune%20asupra%20viitorului%20educatiei%20in%20Roma%CC%82nia.pdf>, Accessed on September 14, 2025, quoted by Mircea Platon, *Deșcolarizarea României* [*The Deschooling of Romania*], Bucharest, Ideea Europeană Publishing House, 2020, p. 176.

<sup>122</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Viața comună* [*Life in common: an essay in general anthropology*], Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2009.

is the endeavor of integrating the self within a perspective of temporary stability. It may start from a state of belonging, but in the liquid universe of postmodernity, it cannot remain there.

### 3. THE FLOURISHING OF IDENTITY IN HISTORY – ETHNICITY

Identity emerged as a theme in modernity, in contexts where social labelling was required, where the individual was no longer recognized as part of an “us” but had to be identified first as another. From the substantialist conception, in which ethnicity “indicated something”, there is a shift, following Max Weber, toward its dynamic definition, from an interactionist perspective. Weber said that ethnic groups are human groups that nurture a subjective belief in a community of origin based on similarities in physical appearance, in manners, or in both, or on memories, so that this belief becomes important, regardless of whether a blood community objectively exists or not<sup>123</sup>. The content of the term is thus primarily subjective, much like the concepts of culture or community: the subjective belief of people that they form a community. It can be said, therefore, that, like culture, ethnicity is a term with an objectively uncertain content. Nevertheless, the survival capacity of these entities is so great that they themselves become subjects in their own right within human social existence, thereby possessing the capacity to objectify that which is attributed to them.

Weber observes that identity belonging is not realized in isolation, but through the communication of differences in interaction with others, with outsiders. Georges Devereux noted that

“the ethnic identity model of a completely isolated tribe would be entirely identical to its model of human identity”<sup>124</sup>.

Ethnicity is an external concept that refers to a subjective, internal reality: ethnicity overlays the consciousness of a group’s community of origin before defining itself, through ethnicity, as distinctions from other groups. As such, ethnicity is studied in relation to differences, that is, to the boundaries between ethnic groups. Fredrik Barth theorizes the notion of the ethnic boundary, opening the way to an interactionist interpretation of culture or ethnic identity. Building on this, for

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<sup>123</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An outline of interpretative sociology*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1978, pp. 393–398.

<sup>124</sup> „modelul de identitate etnică al unui trib complet izolat ar fi cu totul identic cu modelul său de identitate umană”, in Georges Devereux, “L’identité ethnique: ses bases logiques et ses dysfonctions” [“Ethnic identity: its logical foundations and dysfunctions”], in \*\*\*, *Ethnopsychanalyse complémentaire*, Paris, Flammarion Publishing House, 1972, pp. 131–168, *quoted by* Gilles Ferreol and Guy Juquois (coord.), *Dictionarul alterității și al relațiilor interculturale [Dictionary of Otherness and Intercultural Relations]*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2005, p. 277.

instance, are the studies of Albert Ogien, who emphasizes that identities are constructed within social interaction:

“To analyze ethnicity means to make explicit the set of differentiation practices that establish and maintain an ethnic ‘boundary’, rather than to reproduce the cultural substrate commonly associated with an ethnic group as an external and stable content (...). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that there is no ‘identity’ outside of its usage, and no invariant cultural substrate that would define, apart from social action, the essence of a member of a given human group”<sup>125</sup>.

Dominique Schnapper, in turn, acknowledges the shift from the conception of ethnicity as an element of social structure (primordialism) to “ethnicity as a dimension of organization” (inventionism). In this latter understanding, ethnicity is integrated into interactionist explanations, in which social reality, alongside historical reality, is constituted in the flows of social processuality.

According to interactionist theory, ethnicity does not refer to stable structures of socio-cultural identification, but is constituted through

“the variable and never-final processes by which actors identify themselves and are identified by others based on the Us/Them dichotomizations, constructed from cultural traits assumed to derive from a common origin and highlighted within social interactions”<sup>126</sup>.

The four dimensions on which the study of ethnicity is built are as follows:

1. Ethnic identity is never strictly endogenous; rather, it is constituted in the relationship between classification by others (others perception) and identification with a particular group (self-perception); this constitutes “*the categorical attribution*”.
2. The second defining element is the notion of the boundary: through delimitation, separation from others is achieved, the perception of alterity is established, and simultaneously the territoriality of the group is defined.
3. The third dimension is *the common origin* – a fictive kinship, legitimized through historical myths; ethnic identity thus emerges as loyalty to founding events or heroes, as a cult of a mythic (mythologized) reality.
4. The fourth defining dimension of ethnicity, *salience*, refers to the ways in which ethnicity is asserted or emphasized within historical or social

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<sup>125</sup> „A analiza etnicitatea înseamnă a explicita ansamblul practicilor de diferențiere care instaurează și mențin o «frontieră» etnică, și nu a reda substratul cultural asociat în mod curent unui grup etnic ca un conținut de natură externă și stabilă (...) Este necesar atunci să recunoaștem că nu există nicio «identitate» în afara utilizării care i se dă și niciun substrat cultural invariabil care ar defini, în afara acțiunii sociale, esența unui membru al unui anumit grup uman”, in *Ibidem*, p. 278.

<sup>126</sup> „procese variable și niciodată încheiate prin care actorii se identifică și sunt identificați de către ceilalți pe baza dihotomizărilor Noi/Ei, realizate pornind de la trăsături culturale presupuse a fi derivate dintr-o origine comună și puse în evidență în cadrul interacțiunilor sociale”, in Philippe Poutignat and Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, “Catégorisation raciale et gestion de la co-présence dans les situations ‘mixtes’” [“Racial categorization and managing co-presence in ‘mixed’ situations”], in *Notes et Travaux Sociologiques*, No. 1/1995, pp. 22–32, quoted by *Ibidem*, p. 280.

interactions (for example, through the display of specific clothing elements or visual codes; such behaviors aim to establish social labeling, signaling either solidarity or social distance)<sup>127</sup>.

Within the interactionist framework, ethnicity does not refer to an essence, but to a potentiality of personal and social identification, which may or may not be mobilized and may come into conflict, competition, or consonance with individual identity. Georges Devereux thus understood the problem of identity:

“When an individual possesses a sufficient number of sufficiently diversified class identities, each of them becomes a ‘tool’, and their totality a kind of ‘toolkit’ that both actualizes and socially implements their unique personality model”<sup>128</sup>.

The mobilization of a single identity, particularly the ethnic one, would reduce the individual’s instrumental capacity to utilize their “tools” and, therefore, to construct a complex, personal identity. Identity as a supra-individual status is, in this theoretical perspective, replaced by an identity conceived and projected through individual will. There is a belief in individuals’ capacity to transform inherited traits without becoming radically different; indeed, the ability to delimit oneself from the marks of passive identity (assigned, derived from belonging to forms of supra-individual social structures) becomes a measure of self-assertion and the construction of an individual identity. Identity is thus tied to the exercise of freedom, that is, to emancipation from traditional forms of belonging.

#### 4. “A FLOWER ON THE COMMUNITY’S GRAVE”

Identity, the one “blooming on the community’s grave”<sup>129</sup>, is itself – as well! – a processual, fluid phenomenon.

“The construction of identity is a process that never ends and is never complete, and it must remain so if it is to fulfill its promise (...). In the politics of life organized around the struggle for identity, self-creation and self-assertion are central, and the freedom to choose is simultaneously the main weapon and the most desired prize. Final victory would eliminate the problem in a single blow, rendering the weapon obsolete and removing the prize. To avoid this eventuality, identity must remain flexible and always open to further experimentation and change; it must truly be an identity ‘subject to future revision’. The facility to abandon an identity when it no longer satisfies or loses its allure through competition with other, more seductive

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> „Atunci când un individ posedă un număr suficient de identități de clasă suficient de diversificate, fiecare dintre ele devine o «unealtă», iar totalitatea lor un fel de «trusă de unelte» care actualizează și, în același timp, pune în aplicare din punct de vedere social modelul său unic de personalitate”, in Georges Devereux, “L’identité ethnique: ses bases logiques et ses dysfonctions” [“Ethnic identity: its logical foundations and dysfunctions”], in \*\*\*, *Ethnopsychanalyse complémentaire*, Paris, Flammarion Publishing House, 1972, pp. 131–168, quoted by *Ibidem*, p. 281.

<sup>129</sup> „inflorită pe mormântul comunității”, in Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 48.



identities on the market is far more important than the ‘realism’ of an identity currently sought after or joyfully assumed at this moment”<sup>130</sup>.

The cultural Left in the U.S. (cosmopolitans) has asserted itself as an ideology specializing (also) in the politics of difference, identity, and recognition. It establishes new movements (Black Lives Matter, #rezist, woke, etc.) and new academic disciplines (women’s history, African American history, LGBTQ+ studies, and so on – collectively referred to as “victim studies” by Stefan Collini), which provide new grounds for therapeutically identifying with victim categories, either to contribute to their “un-victimization” (empowerment) or to distance oneself from potential identities of aggressors. In any case, it is not fixation on identities (which would partially reconstruct the solid spirit of cultural communities) that is desired and encouraged, but the “exploration” of the community.

Social justice is no longer constructed through a good, just, or fair society, but through the affirmation of the principle – formal and open to change – of human rights. From the perspective opened by this principle, battles begin for the recognition of various forms of rights; for differences intended to be promoted as a privileges to become “rights”, they must be shared by a group, or a numerically significant category of individuals sufficiently determined to be visible and recognized: these privileges must become a collective claim.

“Yet, in practice, it all comes down to controlling the movements of individuals, seeking unconditional loyalty from a few individuals presumed to be bearers of the difference for which recognition is sought, while simultaneously blocking access for all others”<sup>131</sup>.

The process is one that can be logistically projected:

1. the discovery of a difference that can be claimed as a human right;
2. the mobilization and strengthening of the minority bearers;
3. the struggle for recognition<sup>132</sup>.

Among the camp of powerful, cool, or successful people (often the same individuals), as well as among the “nostalgic” of the community, identity no longer

<sup>130</sup> „Construcția identității este un proces care nu se termină și care nu este niciodată complet, și care trebuie să rămână așa dacă vrea să-și țină promisiunea (...). În politica vieții înfășurată în jurul luptei pentru identitate, auto-crearea și auto-afirmarea sunt chestiuni principale, iar libertatea de a alege este în mod simultan principala armă și cel mai dorit premiu. Victoria finală ar elimina problema dintr-o lovitură, nemaiautorizând arma și eliminând premiul. Pentru a evita această eventualitate, identitatea trebuie să rămână flexibilă și întotdeauna deschisă la experimentare ulterioară și la schimbare; trebuie să fie cu adevărat o identitate «până la revizuire ulterioare». Facilitatea de a renunța la o identitate în momentul în care nu mai satisface sau este lipsită de alura ei prin competiția cu alte identități, mai seducătoare, de pe piață, este cu mult mai importantă decât «realismul» identității căutate în mod curent sau preluate și utilizate cu bucurie în acest moment”, in *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>131</sup> „Totuși, în practică, totul se reduce la controlul mișcărilor indivizilor, cerând loialitate necondiționată de la câțiva indivizi despre care se presupune că sunt purtătorii diferenței pentru care li se cere recunoaștere, blocând, în același timp accesul tuturor celorlalți”, in *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

signifies identification (unconscious, to be genuine) with roots or the communal model, nor integration into the collective body (“us”), but rather the search for lost roots or simply for interesting personality profiles.

“Identity seems to be nothing more than a matter of choice and decision, and choices must be respected, and decisions rewarded”<sup>133</sup>.

From cultural and religious identity to familial or sexual identity, its construction can belong to the subject capable of decision-making and worthy simply for assuming it. From children to adults, the absence of directions, orientation, or conditioning continuously reinforces and confirms the power of decision-making. Unfortunately, the quality of these decisions is rarely questioned. For these individuals, community, as well as its nostalgia or ideology, and communitarianism, are considered parts of the philosophy of the weak, those devoid of merit.

The body is approached differently in a producer society, where health was the standard that its members were expected to maintain, and in a consumer society, where physical condition is the measure of bodily well-being. Health was a solid, normative concept, in which the clear distinction between normal and abnormal was made – and measured; its definition, though altered from the dawn of ancient humanism to modernity, referred to a functional state that enabled the fulfillment of socially assigned roles. Subsequently, even health becomes dynamic: pathological thresholds are negotiated and redefined, so that what was considered healthy can be defined as disease, and vice versa. Optimization, evaluation, and risk quantification become part of the individual’s responsibility for their own health. Physical condition becomes even more of a personal construct. It means “being in shape”, encompassing flexibility, mobility, readiness for new challenges, breaking out of stability and routine, and measuring the “current stage of continuous effort”.

“Maintaining physical condition is a state of self-examination, self-critique, and perpetual self-disapproval, and thus of continuous anxiety”<sup>134</sup>.

As an essential part of a projected identity, the body itself becomes fluid. It is part of the self, of that entity of our being presented before others, perceived primarily as an image, fundamentally as an object. From the perspective of rational conduct, every person must be capable of objectifying themselves, viewing themselves from the outside, even imagining, through a double schism, how others see and understand them<sup>135</sup>. A healthy and normal body, if not projected according to the desires or interests of its owner, may be a good product, but without a favorable response in the social or labor market, it is devoid of value. In postmodernity, the

<sup>133</sup> „Identitatea pare să nu fie decât o chestiune de alegere și decizie, iar alegerile trebuie respectate și deciziile – răsplătite”, in *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>134</sup> „Menținerea condiției fizice este o stare de autocercetare, autocritică și autodezaprobare perpetuă și, astfel, de neliniște continuă”, in *Ibidem*, p. 75.

<sup>135</sup> Based on the interactionist perspective, as paraphrased from Charles Horton Cooley: *I am not what I think I am, and I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am*. See Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York, Charles Scribners Sons Publishing House, 1902.

body is no longer merely a given; it is a project, a process of construction and deconstruction. Jacob Schrenk, a German sociologist, speaking about the bodies of human labor resources, noted that each employee is “a company within a company”, having the possibility, indeed the duty, to care for their image and its market value<sup>136</sup>. Tobias Moorstedt observes that identification through the body goes beyond the criteria of health and even of humanity:

“We create an archetype of beauty that is not only young, but younger than the young. The human smile becomes something not human”<sup>137</sup>.

“Whiter than white” – this is the recommendation of dentists for responsible citizens teeth.

Jane Fonda is “an authority” in the field of gymnastics and sport, that is, a personal exemplar with persuasive power; those who follow her example perceive their own bodies through identification with Jane Fonda’s exemplary body. Identification mobilizes the type of effort that followers must exert.

“I like to believe that a large part of my body is my work, my blood and my sweat. It is my responsibility”<sup>138</sup>,

the actress says, the message thus conveying a new conception of the body, which is no longer a given physical, biological entity or mere support for life, but a property, a product, and a responsibility. Consequently, it is at least as important as the care, effort, and attention invested in it.

## 5. CULTURE AND IDENTITY CRISES

In premodernity, communities defined the individual: the self was specified only as part of the “us”. The individual was part of their family, tribe, or village, ultimately part of the universe and the divine. They received roles and, more importantly, missions that made them directly responsible for the balance of the world, their community, and consequently, themselves. Sociological role and status theory exploits this type of integration or continuity between the individual and the social milieu of which they are an innate part. The decline of culture and the type of social structure associated with it – namely, communities – leads to a decline in the meanings of human existence: roles are no longer cultural (father, brother, wife, master, cultivator, etc. – most related to familial roles<sup>139</sup>), but social-political, civic,

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<sup>136</sup> Jakob Schrenk, *Arta exploatării de sine sau minunata lume nouă a muncii [The Art of Self-Exploitation or the Brave New World of Work]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2010, pp. 111–128.

<sup>137</sup> „Noi creăm un arhetip al frumuseții care nu este doar tânăr, ci mai tânăr decât tânărul. Zâmbetul omenesc devine ceva neomenesc”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>138</sup> „Îmi place să cred că o mare parte din corpul meu este opera mea și sângele și sudoarea mea. Este responsabilitatea mea”, in Zygmunt Bauman, *quoted work*, 2000, p. 64.

<sup>139</sup> See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

or professional. Even essential cultural manifestations, archetypes, have been redefined in civic vocabulary: the priest is a professional, parents are parental agents, the woman is a citizen, and so is the child. The human being, created by God, becomes a biological structure or a statistical unit. Roles are assigned, or, in the increasing fluidity of postmodernity, proposed to all based on this non-cultural quality of humanity. The search for purpose, for meaning, is reinterpreted as the search for identity or, more constructively, the projection of identity.

Constructivist definitions of ethnicity have disentangled identity from the culture of the mother tongue and religious practice. By endowing the individual with a “toolkit” through which they can construct their own social profile, identification becomes a perpetual challenge and an individual responsibility. Psychology has assumed the task of monitoring human capacities for self-identification and personality plasticity; politics establishes the resources that can contribute to identification. Nevertheless, people are still unaccustomed to their cultural emancipation. Some fail in the effort to invent and assert an identity; others stall when required to change their identity. Here the cultural supremacy of the family becomes evident: the definition of roles was supra-individual, and their assignment lay beyond the control or decision of the individual. Before birth or after death, a person already has a role, announcing and representing realities whose dimensions ranged from the most prosaic materialism to the most sublime transcendence. Identity is not necessary, because no one must introduce themselves to those who have always known them, yet it can be actualized through the roles each person receives, combines, and transforms within the family culture: one is simultaneously a son, brother, parent, godparent and godchild, cousin and uncle, descendant and ancestor, yet the roles and the levels at which they are enacted constantly shift. Postmodern constructed and deconstructed identity is rigid and elementary; it relies on props, costumes, image above all, and on what the individual declares about themselves. It is therefore natural that, like any artificial construct, identity shaped with Devereux’s toolkit (see above) may be ill-suited to human nature and unable to endure over extended periods of human life.

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) proposed a theory in which there are eight stages of psycho-social development, each marked by a specific “crisis” or challenge. The stage most closely associated with identity is the fifth stage, defined as the tension between the clarification of individuality and role confusion<sup>140</sup>. The period and the individuals experiencing this crisis had been earlier defined as adolescence and adolescents, a definition that removes these individuals from the capacity to identify with the family culture, placing them within a clinical horizon and characterizing them as inevitably destined for change, experimentation, and confusion. Stanley Hall (1844–1924), the American psychologist who popularized this concept, defined it through “storm and stress”<sup>141</sup>, emphasizing the conflicts and tensions that may arise.

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<sup>140</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company Publishing House, 1968.

<sup>141</sup> Stanley Hall, *Adolescence*, New York, D. Appleton and Company Publishing House, 1904.

That these do not necessarily or universally occur, and that where social or family culture is strong adolescence is a redundant idea, is seldom mentioned today. In any case, the identity crisis first appears in human life during this period. For Erikson, the formation of a stable identity is essential for one's mental health and subsequent development, such as forming deep relationships or establishing a career. Identity provides continuity and coherence in an individual's life – but, we add, only in the absence of genuine cultural integration. The identity crisis, on the other hand, was first conceptually identified in a veteran's rehabilitation clinic during the Second World War, where soldiers, without suffering other forms of stress, "had through the exigencies of war lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity"<sup>142</sup>.

Being a frequent phenomenon in the fluid society of postmodernity, the identity crisis is not an evil per se, but a normal and even necessary process, which can lead to personal growth and maturation. It is the moment when the adolescent "tests" different roles, values, and beliefs to see what fits:

"The adolescent is in a position of psycho-social *moratorium*, during which the young person experiments with different roles and identities to find a cohesive self"<sup>143</sup>.

Erikson describes the identity crisis as a critical moment in psycho-social development, in which the individual must confront the question "Who am I?" and construct a coherent identity, defined as the accumulation of one's cumulative experiences of physical, psychological, and social transformations. He acknowledges that, although normalized by its frequent occurrence in modern societies, where communal ties<sup>144</sup> are almost dissolved, the identity crisis borders on psycho-social pathology: it is an extraction of the individual from the world, a loss of landmarks, social connections, and self-perception; identity confusion results when the adolescent is unable to resolve the identity crisis, leading to role confusion and an unclear sense of self<sup>145</sup>.

The crisis, that is, the loss of identity and the meaning of one's own existence, is not limited to the threshold between childhood and adulthood but can affect various moments and situations. The more generations are familiar with post-culture, with the fluidity of existence controlled by impersonal authorities, the more identity crises, loneliness, and anomic phenomena (such as deviance, addictions, and suicide) reach higher levels<sup>146</sup>. Subcultures and urban communities that preserved some cultural belonging are themselves disappearing. Under these conditions, clinical and psychological interventions, as well as educational, professional, and civic-political systems, cannot resolve the problem and seem already oriented toward a society of people without individuality. A society that prevents crises by placing its members

<sup>142</sup> „datorită constrângerilor războiului și-a pierdut simțul identității personale și al continuității istorice”, in Erik Erikson, *quoted work*, p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> „Adolescentul se află într-o poziție de moratoriu psihosocial, perioadă în care tânărul experimentează diferite roluri și identități pentru a-și găsi un sine coerent”, in *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>144</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *quoted work*, pp. 22–50.

<sup>145</sup> Erik Erikson, *quoted work*, pp. 128–135.

<sup>146</sup> Samira Cîrlig, “The Snowflake Generation – the implications of overdeveloped ego on social reality”, in *Revista Universitară de Sociologie*, Year XVIII, No. 3/2022, Craiova, pp. 362–368.

in crises: for the individual, the crisis is normality, a challenge, an opportunity for growth; for the authorities of social control, the crisis is the end.

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