

**“Babeş – Bolyai” University
Faculty of European Studies**

**IDENTITY ISSUES IN
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

- Summary -

Scientific Advisor:
Prof. Ion Cuceu, PhD

PhD Student:
Gabriela Ioana Mocan

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Keywords: *identity, alterity, self, memory, culture, language, intercultural communication, narrativity, negotiation.*

Far from the ages in which ‘roles’ were distributed on a social level, for they were assumed in a natural manner by the individuals who seldom had the chance to question them, a rather heavy task lies before the contemporary man: he must face the toil resulting in the delimitation of his place in the world all alone. While in the past society provided substantial identity references to the individual, references he himself assumed rather unconsciously, contemporary times are less generous in this respect, leaving him to come up with the answer to the burning question of “Who am I?” himself. Thus, we are witnessing a shift from the “collective individual” to the “self-focused individual”, from a holistic conception of identity to one that is highly individualized. A significant paradigm shift marks the transition from a time when a person’s identity was assigned from the outside to one in which its definition is assumed individually, launching the individual into a permanent life analysis. This self-quest is certainly identifiable throughout the entire history of mankind; however, what makes it into a significant trait of the 20th century is its generalization, the fact that during this period it has manifested itself in the form of social conformity. In this century, finding one’s self becomes an obligation that seems to function on a large scale, targeting everyone, beyond any individual trait (social origin, age, profession, etc.). The 20th century is thus the period in which a key role has been assigned to the individual in defining his own identity, which became almost exclusively the result of an individual labor.

The powerful doubts cast by the 20th century over one’s identity become an obvious and indisputable explanation for the massively increased number of autobiographical writings. We do not merely refer here to the productions that aspire to belong to the realm of literature, but to attempts of identity clarification through *in extenso* writing. This phenomenon, observed and analyzed by all (of the) humanities confirms identity confusion as a defining trait of this century, and all those who lay down their life story on paper are haunted by the anxiety, confusion or frustration they hope to tame through writing. Their ordeal will be appeased in finding a satisfactory answer – through writing – to a question

that in its simplified form can always be reduced to three simple words: “Who am I?” We believe, therefore, that any form of autobiography, whether written or oral, originates from the impossibility of the seeker to provide a clear and satisfactory answer to this question. Identity itself is neither a fixed formula, nor a presumed good, and the challenge of the search bears higher value than the spreading of certain convictions for one’s self and for others.

The present work intends to address the prevailing social realities on a global scale, and secondly within the European context at this time in history, realities discussed in terms of differences and divergences, identity crises (of any type – national, ethnic, cultural) and attempts of laying the foundations for an undivided world. In the words of Werner Heisenberg, one of the inventors of quantum physics, “We have to remember that what we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning”.¹ Our **goal** here is not to proclaim the ultimate truth or to provide an exclusivist set of recipes on approaching the issues of identity, but to present, according to our own thought, the stages of such an endeavor within the context of the permeability of borders and fusion of cultural differences.

The image that persists in our mind as the visual symbol of this venture is that of the accordion² in search of its own sounds: starting out with a clear knowledge of its own shape, but not its content (*I*, who can see my contour in the mirror, still, not understanding what is behind this surface), opens up with sounds produced by the expanding bellows and the pressing of the buttons (opening toward alterity, revealing the layers of identity and becoming aware of the differences, meeting in a space of common existence), for it only to return to its initial position, enriched, however, by a myriad of musical notes (opening toward the world, translated in terms of self-knowledge). Recently, at a conference entitled *What to do about the black horse?*, the philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu spoke about the drama of love, which, according to him, consists of this stepping out of one’s own person and

¹ *Questioning the Scientific Worldview*, <http://www.integralscience.org/questioning.html>, accessed on February 8, 2013.

² „The instrument is played by compressing or expanding the bellows while pressing buttons or keys, causing valves, called pallets, to open, which allow air to flow across strips of brass or steel, called reeds, that vibrate to produce sound inside the body.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accordion>

installing oneself outside of it: “Every love lasts as long as its ecstasy, as long as the two (people) remain in a place that is outside of them – and outside of others – a place that holds and contains both of them. But as any ek-stasis, any placement of yourself outside yourself and any suspension of one’s own breath are limited, every love gets tired in its own externalization or ex-propriation”.³ We are wondering, however, if this ‘externalization’ of the being could be the driving force of love and the source of self-knowledge. For once we have stepped out of the grip of a shrunken shirt to greet the other, we are able to return to a brighter place: that of the awakened self.

Concerning the research **methodology** with regard to the identity phenomenon, recent studies in the area suggest the need to address the process of identity construction through an interdisciplinary approach. Marc Lipiansky⁴ proposes three disciplines that should be studying the complexity of this process: psycho-sociology (assigning, categorization, labeling, social differentiation, in-group, out-group, reference group, group affiliation, social status, social roles), psychoanalysis (identification, projection, conscience, self) and semiotics (representation, myth, ideology). Our work falls along the lines of this interdisciplinary approach, based on an anthropological framework, having participative observation as the primary research method, along with a structured interview, as well as some informal, semi-structured interviews, which while not included will lend substance to the subsequent interpretations.

The four chapters that focus on the analysis of such concepts as **identity, alterity, culture, communication, language, multiculturalism, interculturalism, identity negotiation** and **narrativity** will represent the stages of this journey. The first chapter entitled *Identity and alterity – on rewriting the Self*, begins with a framing of the topic by presenting the meaning and implications of migration, as well as those of interculturalism on the definition of identity, followed by certain clarifications of terms often related to the notion of identity, such as: *I, self, person, being, individual, subject*.

³ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Ce ne facem cu calul negru? Despre căderea în trup, dragoste și ipocrizie* (carte audio), București: Humanitas, 2011.

⁴ Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan (Ed.), *L'identité. L'individu, le groupe, la société*, Auxerre Cedex: Sciences Humaines Editions, 1998, p. 30.

What is identity and what makes us be who we are? In an attempt to provide some guidance in order to find the answers to these questions, the second subchapter will discuss the issue of personal identity by resorting to philosophy and by presenting an overview of some crucial theories in defining the individual: (1) René Descartes and his rationalist doctrine that puts reason above all, considering the body as a mere contingent to our existence; (2) John Locke and his empiricist theory according to which personal identity is related to psychological continuity; (3) Martin Heidegger and existentialism, with special emphasis on outlining one's own identity through action and (4) Eric Olson and Paul Snowdown with their controversial interpretation by way of which the body itself is the first and last identity of a person.

Notions such as 'internal' vs 'social' or 'personal self' vs 'collective self' explain the so-called interactive performances in which the individual manifests certain aspects of his identity, according to a particular context. In this respect, what people convey to others does not necessarily coincide with their self-perception. Freud, with his famous distinction between the *ego* (self-in-the-world) and *id* (self), along with Snyder and Goffman, are but a few of the advocates of a fragmented self, of the division of the individual and that of the struggle between self-identification and the identification made by others.

In contrast, in interacting with others, individuals communicate aspects of their self through a series of signals that others need to learn how to read and evaluate. The negotiation between self-presentation and external evaluation can be viewed as a performance that helps in the construction of the individual's social identity. While the internal identity is constructed and maintained in its entirety by the individual, social identity is perceived externally, based not on intentions, but on expression and the manner in which an individual's presentation is perceived. Accordingly, the environment plays an essential part in the production and perception of social identities, the public version of the self being influenced by the internalized version, which in turn evolves based on the individual's experiences. The more an experience incites the notion of self for an individual in relation to society, the greater its impact on his identity will be.

The issue of personal identity is raised in terms of identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for maintaining this identity, since our beings cannot be reduced to a

constant state, but rather that of a ‘becoming’. Therefore, in order not to lose the true essence of personal identity, three elements will be put forth which, in our view, are defining and necessary in understanding the connection between identity and alterity, namely: memory, conscience and perception. Our identity is defined by a stream of experiences filtered through self-consciousness, which in turn is based on the power of our memory to place the current experience within a temporal continuum. Our personal histories are histories of lived experiences and this fact is essential in understanding one’s own person. As pointed out by Alisdair MacIntyre,⁵ the integrity of an individual’s life is conditioned by its perception as a narrative that develops from birth to death.

The opposition between identity and alterity dominates the threefold structure of a person, alterity itself being divided into complementary alterity (you) and absolute alterity (him). We refer here to the transposition of the self into another soul, even to a personality split, an apparent hypertrophy of the ‘I’, an ‘I’ that nevertheless paradoxically extends into alters of ipseity by successive reflections. However, these ‘dissipations’ take it constantly further apart from its particular self. Therefore, the connection put forth as a reference point in the title of this endeavor is not a dialectic antinomy – identity vs alterity – for it becomes identity and alterity, or better yet *both identity and alterity at the same time*. We live in a postmodern world that alters the border of our social self and that exposes our identity within the paradoxical “I am another”. Identity is exposed in a double sense: it is firstly displayed, (ex)posed, as a series, image, representation, affiliation, but always as individual or collective memory, then exposed to the danger of being disbanded.

The **second chapter** of the work – *Identity layers and dimensions* – addresses a field that is open to scientific research and one that is widely discussed, namely identity and some of its layers (national, ethnic, cultural and social). Taking into account the strong dynamic nature of contemporary societies, one can undoubtedly state that identities are subject to constant changes, as the meaning of the concept of identity is not and never will be a stable one, being open to debates among anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and other specialists. For, as Pascal Bruckner stated, “In an era in which history rushes over us as a storm in an overwhelming accumulation of facts, simply to understand what is in

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London: Duckworth, 1981, CH 15.

fact happening becomes increasingly difficult, the notion of ‘complexity’ becoming the new intellectual fetish legitimizing a sense of helplessness”.⁶

From Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ to the nation-state, national identity is approached from two main directions: on the one hand the disappearance of borders, merging of nations and dissolution of national identity toward a global identity, and on the other hand the strengthening of defense over national characters precisely because of such an interference. Paradoxically, along with diversity, the mixing of races and globalization nowadays, there is a strong response of reinforcing national identity. In Italy or France, it has become a legislative concern meant to stop the massive immigration tendencies subsequent to the birth of the European Union. Dieckhoff shows us, step by step, that not even the ideal of the French nation covers only the community of French citizens, and that from a historical standpoint the French nation was born as the result of a conscious process of cultural and linguistic homogenization conducted by the state, that began during the French Revolution.⁷

The challenge of a national identity consists, in a fundamental manner, in its multi-dimensional nature; it could never be reduced to one single element. The creation of a national identity is by its own nature a subjective process undergoing changes over time, and any attempt to standardize it beyond its cultural barriers or to replace past structures of national identity with current ones will eventually fail in understanding its fluid nature and inherent subjectivity. As emphasized by Habermas, in response to the standardization forces, “new constellations” create “a new multiplicity of hybridized forms”,⁸ by the transfer of national identity to cosmopolitan ones.

Ethnic identity, the second dimension approached in this chapter is discussed in close connection with other two terms: race and nation. After its introduction, the term *ethnic group* evolved in two important directions: the first one by acquiring certain

⁶ Pascal Bruckner, *Melancholia democrației. Cum să trăiești fără dușmani?*, București: Antet, 1990, p.7.

⁷ Alain Dieckhoff, *Nation and Naționalism in France: Between Idealism and Reality*, lucrare în cadrul atelierului Național Identity and Euroscepticism: A Comparison Between France and the United Kingdom, 13 May 2005, http://oxpo.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/național_identity/Dieckhoff_Paper.pdf

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Conștiință morală și acțiune comunicativă*, translated by Gilbert Lepădatu, București: ALL EDUCAȚIONAL, 2000, p. 75.

connotations on the traditional-modern axis, and the other, the meanings of which can be understood from the perspective of the nation-state's cultural ideology. Those who use the term *ethnic* in the sense of a traditional community, make use of it in relation to peoples with a distinct historical and cultural profile, which are considered to be traditional, lagging behind as compared to the standards of modernity. In most cases, however, the term *ethnic* refers to the immigrants who retain and articulate a clearly different cultural profile as compared to the dominant public culture of the society in which they are incorporated.

After clarifying the etymology of the word *ethnicity* we move on to Barth and his ethnic groups, according to whom ethnic identities are flexible and characterized by situational variability. Accordingly, difference is organized, firstly, by individuals in interaction. But not all interactions are as meaningful in this respect. The continuity of ethnic communities – a better term for now than groups or categories – is particularly dependent on maintaining boundaries while interacting with others (for whom we are, in turn, the others). Referring to Goffman's 'presentation of self', Barth⁹ argues that all inter-ethnic relations require rules to be recognized and accepted in order to be organized. Although the word 'rules' might be too strong, involving a certain degree of conscious formulation that is not plausible, these interactional conventions or habits shape not only the difference itself. They define the limits of the interaction and allow either part to participate by the lowest degree of consent regarding the common acceptable behavior.

The third dimension, cultural identity, perhaps the most important one given its inclusive nature (we might argue that the other dimensions may very well fit under its umbrella), will justify its own relevance through the importance many researchers give to culture. Cultural identity is an individual's 'sense of self', derived from his formal or informal affiliation to groups that convey and instill in him knowledge, opinions, attitudes, values, traditions and ways of life. Cultural identity is merely one of the dimensions of the large concept of individual identity. Objective identity, represented by one's birth certificate, passport, voter registration and other official documents differ dramatically from subjective identity: the individual's sense of who he is as a human being.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

While cultural identity implies the transfer of values and information from one generation to the next, social identity is often related to a certain moment in time. Starting from Émile Durkheim's notion of 'collective consciousness', to Karl Marx's 'class consciousness' or Ferdinand Tönnies' 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*), we will study the issue of social identity from the standpoint of two essential approaches: (1) the psychosocial approach brought forth by Tajfel & Turner, which emphasizes the notion of social category and identity conditioning arising in the mind of the individual and (2) the sociological approach associated to Sheldon Stryker, according to which the self reflects society to the extent in which we believe the self to represent a set of identities derived from the roles assumed by an individual.

Social identity is addressed today in sociology as a social process. It consists in the systematic and meaningful establishment of certain relationships of similarity or difference between individuals, between communities or between individuals and communities. Taken together, similarity and difference are the two dynamic principles of identity, the core of social life. Inside a group each individual opens up toward the other (both consciously and unconsciously) in order to get to know himself. Identity therefore involves a process of constant communication: putting myself together with the beings of others. I am what I am (myself) only in contrast with another. Through reflection I draw my individuality. From this perspective, it is worth noting the important distinction between self-identification and hetero-identification. Generally, people tend to diminish the distance between self-identification (what they believe themselves to be and the references against which they identify themselves) and hetero-identification (the manner in which they are identified from the outside) by way of different psycho-social mechanisms. In social practice, there is no difference between self- and hetero-identification: I am as I am to the extent to which others recognize me to be this way. Only on an analytical level I can self-assign an identity that others do not know, do not recognize and do not legitimize. Thus, social identity sums up all the criteria that allow a social definition of the individual or the group, namely that which places the individual in a determined social setting.

In the **third chapter** of the thesis, entitled *Intercultural dialogue and the challenges of identity*, we venture into the analysis of the communication process, focusing

on intercultural communication. We intend to show the crucial importance of communication in postmodernity and we will highlight two components that define the success or failure of communication: culture and language (along with its manifestations). Viewed from the standpoint of the foreign language instructor, the issue of cultural adaptation is analyzed in terms of linguistic integration. But beyond the use of these special 'weapons', communication must be seen as networking, identity itself being influenced by the connections and roles we perform in relation to another person.

The anthropology of principles in relational communication is rooted in antiquity, ever since man was viewed by Aristotle as a 'social animal'. More contemporary statements of these understandings emerged with the likes of Buber who discussed the 'in-between', Bakhtin who explicated the dialogic nature of inter-human relations, Weber who suggested that social action results from those involved in social relationships that are constituted through social interaction, and Simmel who asserted that society itself is constituted in the forms of interaction between its members.¹⁰

The final part of the chapter presents the immature angles of the European integration project and pursues the resolution of all conflicts by encouraging awareness for a common space and the connection to a shared destiny of all Europeans. In concrete terms, we will attempt to offer solutions for ending the crisis and for this purpose references will be made to the concept of communication and intercultural communication, demonstrating the interdependent relationship existing between these two and culture. Communication is the basis of existence within a community, it is the corner stone without which one cannot speak of a society, of well-organized social groups that meet certain laws and are 'directed' by institutions. In reality, "culture and communication make for an odd couple. Neither one can be explained without the other. The two phenomena are not perfectly sealed, cannot be contained, nor can they be located in the plane of parallel reflections by way of an analogical correspondence".¹¹

¹⁰ Forrest Russell Wood, *Relational Communication in Negotiation Interaction*, Utah: University of Utah, ProQuest, 2008, p. 21.

¹¹ Jean Caune, *Cultură și comunicare*, București: Cartea românească, 2000, p. 17.

The **fourth** and last **chapter** in a strictly theoretical sense – *Narrative, narrativity, negotiation and identity construction* – addresses the idea of narrative identity, introducing the notion of *life stories*. The biographical techniques used to examine how experience is invested with meaning, autobiographical reports that can be obtained through oral communication or by written records, life stories define us and – apart from their quasi-fictional character – issue signals and provide clues for interpretation. Patrick Charaudeau initially used the term discursive identity, a term by which the suggested or expressed identity model is projected by an intratextual agency, with which the subject can identify himself. According to the meaning given to the term, Charaudeau recognizes the merit of language in making the subject responsible for his own past, in creating a sense of solidarity to this past and in being a necessary element in the constitution of a collective identity, but he states that it is not the language, which testifies to cultural particularities, but the discourse. Neither the words in their morphology, nor the syntax rules are the ones that carry the cultural, but the manner in which each community speaks, their ways of using words, of reasoning, of telling stories, of arguing, joking, explaining, persuading, seducing.¹²

Identity negotiation in this context appears as a way of fastening the personal boundaries, of power games and attempts to conquer the beliefs of others. An important advantage of the identity negotiation framework is that it explicitly recognizes both the influence of personal traits (objectives, agendas and life stories) and the social structural variables (norms, roles and social conventions) regarding the nature and result of social interactions. This relatively wide perspective can lead to insights that could not be obtained merely through a personal or social standpoint. Identity itself is not something finite; it can be understood only as a process, as becoming, and to try to contain it in a well-defined framework would be like vowing to stop the flow of water inside a child's fist. "Not even death can freeze the picture: there is always the possibility of a post mortem revision of identity (and some identities – that of the martyr, for instance – can only be achieved beyond the grave)".¹³

¹² Patrick Charaudeau, *Langage et discours. Eléments de sémiolinguistique*, Paris: Hachette, 1994.

¹³ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, Routledge: London and New York, 1996, p. 4.

Through translation and code switching identities are negotiated throughout the discourse. Before being a linguistic exchange, translation involves a cultural transfer that requires that meta-standpoint, without which the translation process would be an amputated attempt of transposing the message of alterity into words. As the form of cultural-linguistic globalization, it is “the magical utopia, by virtue of which we all have access to the great texts of mankind, it is the utopia in which we live, and that we are preserving by continuing to translate”.¹⁴ The second way in which identities are negotiated from a socio-linguistic standpoint is the *code-switching* phenomenon, a manifestation of contact between languages, being frequently encountered in the context of bilingualism or multilingualism, when the speakers alternately use linguistic elements belonging to the languages that are known to them, especially in informal situations.

Identity negotiation is often performed behind masks, and in a role confusion: author–actor–character. Putting on a mask is one of the means of signaling a certain identity or any changes that might occur to it. For renowned anthropologist Donald Pollock,¹⁵ masks are not simple images or direct representations of the objects or beings they portray, but rather symbols and identity clues. Masks represent only one of the countless semiotic systems, which are linked together by their conventional use in disguising, transforming, or displaying a certain identity.

The fifth and last chapter in our study is intended to be an analysis of the manner in which immersion of one’s self in another culture and exposure to interculturalism leave a trace on personal identity. The main reason behind the research is the increased intercultural contact and subsequent concern for this issue on a global level. Therefore, there is a need on the part of the individuals to rediscover their cultural roots and to express their identity through numerous means provided for them by the new communication technologies. While traditional anthropology targeted clearly defined cultures and communities, theories of globalization are more focused on transnational and delocalization matters. To be understood, globalization must be studied at the level of the people involved,

¹⁴ Marina Vazaca, „Prețul dorinței de a traduce”, în *România Literară*, nr. 8/29 feb. 2008, p. 3.

¹⁵ Donald Pollock, “Masks and the Semiotics of Identity” în *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Sep. 1995, pp. 581-597.

who make plans, travel, form national or international networks, and global ethnography might represent an alternative towards this understanding.

The interview is one of the most important working methods in sociological research, being the most widely used for collecting data in qualitative investigation. This method allows the researcher to understand the human being in a deep and nuanced manner, his relations with the outside world, as well as his beliefs and behaviors specific to certain social groups. Unlike other research methods, the interview is a complex process that involves the establishment of a bond between the interviewer and the subject, an art in formulating the questions and in listening. In Chinese, the word “to listen” has a strong cultural meaning (see Figure 1.), consisting of the four receptors involved in the receiving of a message: the ears (hearing), the eyes (non-verbal language analysis), the mind (message processing by the activation of rationalization processes) and soul (empathizing and transcending verbal appearances). We consider the adoption of this formula to be absolutely necessary in carrying out the interviews, especially since “Interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets”.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ann Oakley, “Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms” in Helen Roberts (Ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 41.

a chinese hanzi often requires multiple characters to create a unique word. this word uses the characters from which it is made to greater convey its meaning



Figure 1: Chinese logogram, the equivalent of the verb “to listen”

The research subjects were mainly foreign students on learning mobility at “Babeş-Bolyai” University, who were involved in a structured interview starting from the general idea that to adapt to an intercultural environment is quite a challenge as it often makes way for changes in the realm of personal identity. Although initially we wanted to use an unstructured interview, prior attempts in an informal setting with a few participants at the international summer courses of Romanian language and civilization, organized by the Institute of Romanian Language as a European Language in Cluj-Napoca, between 5-23 July 2010, revealed the possible risks of adopting such an approach: the consent of an extremely small number of participants to take part in such a study. Since the topic addressed in the present work is highly sensitive, revealing certain vulnerabilities that far too few have the courage to assume, the subjective nature of some of the answers and implicitly that of our interpretations must be admitted. Moreover, the complexity of the topic and the fact that it might touch upon more abstract areas of thought make the number of those open to such a study drop significantly, or as in the present situation, make certain

questions difficult to understand, thus leading to a refusal in answering the question or wrongly approaching the issue itself.

Therefore, we started off with an interview structured in two parts (the first referring to culture and the second placing emphasis on language), adding up to 18 questions (mostly open ones) focused on issues related to origins, self-definition, the degree of exposure to other cultures, change and inner conflicts, identity negotiation, the role of national identity, defining 'home', language skills (knowledge of other languages) and the way in which identity is manifested in the language options. The subjects of the interviews, 26 students who have studied in Romania (BBU, Cluj-Napoca), with ages between 20 and 39, have been selected from our own students and students of other colleagues from the department. It is important to note that the short period of their stay in Romania (in most cases no more than a semester) did not allow us to build a close relationship, an aspect reflected in some of the responses, for there is clearly a reservation that can be noticed in their replies. Also, the study of identity issues in an intercultural context will stay anchored in the onset of such an experience, as we well know the fact that many such details suffer changes after a longer period of time and exposure.

However, before the interview, as the clearly defined method of this research, we were attracted by the idea of participatory observation exercises the first time we have ever heard about it, at the first lecture of an *Ethnographic Research Methods* class we took. Later on, once the topic of this work started to materialize, we have noticed a gradual transition from the conscious researcher who did not transgress the limits set forth in the formal framework of the research, to the observer focused on the identity analysis of both herself and that of her entourage and social environment. From ordinary discussions that touched upon this topic to the status of a foreigner in a more personal context (while attending conferences abroad, the experience of living in another country or mere trips taken as a tourist), the fervor of this vast topic fueled our interest in what was to become a permanent preoccupation.

Identity has been and remains a delicate issue, difficult and controversial regardless of age, sex, profession, ethnicity, national or racial affiliation. The sensitivity of this topic is given by the connection it bears to other themes that have always captured the interest of

public or political debates, such as: race, nation, ethnic group, or more recently gender. In this respect, we find a wide range of concepts like: national identity, ethnic identity, social identity, religious identity, political identity, gender identity, etc. both in literature and everyday life. Perhaps the greatest difficulty of the concept lies in its strong semantic load borrowed from logics (and we are thinking here of the principle according to which A is equal only with itself and different from everything else), a principle that many are attempting – without much success – to translate into the social sciences. Hence, the controversy on the utility or analytical value of the concept as such.

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