NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: The paper refers to the issue of Romanian cultural identity as integral part of European culture, focusing on Mircea Eliade's interwar journalism; it brings together his opinions and emphasizes a dynamic perspective upon identity, whereby Eliade reveals a Romanian vocation for cultural synthesis, both diachronically and in synchrony. As the historical nationalism represents a path to cultural synchronization, Mircea Eliade adopts a moderate position with regard to the relationship between autochthonism and cosmopolitanism and considers that Romania's marginal geographical position can be capitalized on as a place of mediation. The same view appears in both his works of religious history and his literature.

Keywords: journalism, dynamic, identity, autochthonism, cosmopolitanism

To define national identity Mircea Eliade's journal articles from "Cuvântul", "Vremea" and "Destin" bring into discussion the Romanian phenomenon in relation to the historical[1] and spiritual[2] dimension that generates the consciousness of belonging "to a great and glorious group of people to whom history reserves a wide range of action and creation" (*Românismul d-lui Rădulescu Motru / [Mr. Rădulescu Motru's Romanianism]*), contextualizing the ethnic dimension.

Eliade's vision of the evolution of historical consciousness is organic. He outlines the morphology of Romanian historical identity through several terms that define it diachronically and synchronically: the people whose defining characteristic is creativity because of its power of assimilation, the nation with a spiritual function, and the state as cultural tool that should help every citizen to create.

Happy historical existence should therefore involve a *dynamic* and *coherent relation* between historical and ahistorical planes, cultured and popular, modern and archaic. For in Eliade's vision, intellectual *elites* and *peasants* are the most valuable *creative classes* of the Romanian people, vital groups who fulfill a historic creative mission in the ontological plane of identity: some defend its spiritual values while the others its concrete being. The "history instinct" of the two categories becomes visible in the struggle to defend freedom, the ancestors' land and its spiritual geography by assimilating world culture, fighting foreign influences and defending Romanian spirituality.

Apparently, modern creators who were spiritually located in rural intuitions seem to reflect by repetition the popular spiritual paradigm: although they did not belong to the social class of the peasantry, but came from all social classes, they did not express the soul of a

[1] This type of nationalism is in line with Rădulescu-Motru's balanced position, see the article *Românismul d-lui Rădulescu Motru / [Mr. Rădulescu Motru's Romanianism])* about which he says that "it is nationalist without being chauvinistic, and believes in Romanianism, though without accepting the battle line of the far right (...), placed on the central axis of Kogălniceanu's and Eminescu's Romanianism (...), optimistic and confident in the continued progress of the Romanian people (...), while weighted, lucid, and critical in its nationalist judgment".

[2] In his article *Cultură sau politică?/ [Culture or Politics?]*, Eliade comments on this particular view, specific to Nae Ionescu, referring to an article written by his Magister in 1928.

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class, but of the nation, characterized by "realism, propensity to experience, concrete detail, authenticity and drama" (*Realităţi româneşti / [Romanian Realities]*).

Eliade configure two alternative instances of human participation in the spiritual values involved in nationalism. The former represents the aspiration to collective eternity and involves "commitment to history, geography, and the concrete experience", a fervent living experience of love for ancestors and the earth (*ibid.*). The latter belongs to the great creators and it is *individual* and *transhistorical*.

However, both seem to be designed after a *cruciform pattern*[3]; they do not presuppose preservation, sterile imitation and absolutization of its forms of manifestation on the vertical axis of the past but a continuous *relativization*[4] and *transformation* by *contextualizing* forms horizontally and linking them to historical values of the present.

Historical nationalism and its ideals, the creation of the "new man", with straightforward creative mind, bears the mark of a personalist conception, with a vitalistic energetic coloratura. Eliade illustrates it by great personalities like Eminescu, Haşdeu and Heliade Rădulescu. Because the meaning of national and individual existence is creative, the most glorious nationalists are, in his opinion, the creators of all kinds of thought, art or deed, not "dime a dozen" politicians since some take part in the "history being made" while the others serve the history which "is being consumed" (cf. *Naţionalismul / [Nationalism]*).

In keeping with the concept of living in a historical plane, Eliade exalts Eminescu's national propheticism manifested through an overwhelming thirst for creation, a peerless civic optimism, courage and spirit of adventure, and considers that great spirits, that should be representative of Romania and Romanianism abroad, harmonize themselves with the "optimistic, honest, heroic and loyal soul" of the Romanian people (*Roumain*, *Romanian*, *Rumane*, *Rumeno*). They have promoted a messianic, prophetic or revolutionary nationalism, searching for the Romanians' historical and super-historical mission that derives not from a temporal formula, but from the consciousness of a people who creates spiritual and cultural values, new forms of life.

In our opinion, Eliade's vision as historian of religions leaves its mark on his historical philosophy in discussing the value of spiritual creations; they are at once in a relationship of *continuity* and *discontinuity* with tradition, *renewing* it with a "leap" in synchronic spiritual ontology; Eliade's conception is humanistic and opposes generous and constructive momentum to Maiorescianism[5], critical consciousness and Puritanism, as well as a concern for revisions, ritual bans and doctrinal issues (*Popor fără misiune? / [Missionless People?]*).

This type of nationalism that fully exploits "an act of individual experience" through the "discovery of personal meaning in historical existence" is fertile, organic and becomes emblematic and *universalist*. It "shatters geography, overtakes history" and individual interests, affirming a second type of eternity, beyond history through brilliant spiritual creations that come to belong to all peoples (*România în eternitate / [Romania in eternity]*).

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[3] Related to this pattern of understanding, see *Comentarii la Legenda Meşterului Manole / [Comments to the Legend of Master Manole]*, in *Drumul spre centru / [The Road toward the Center]*, Univers, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 453-454.

[4] Andrei Pleşu, *Limba păsărilor / [The Language of Birds]*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1994, p. 100.

[5] The term is coined from Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), an influential critic and political thinker of nineteenth century Romania.

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Eliade disagrees with the radicalization of the two dimensions, national and universal, which has prevailed since Eminescu; their correlation seems to be done in a *reticular*, *polycentric* system, and involves an *ecumenical* vision in defining access to universalism by *deepening* the specific, the particular and the local. In his opinion, nationalism can not be achieved by purification of foreign influences and absolutization of autochthonous life forms, or by "paşoptism"[6] which to him is indiscriminate imitation of the forms of foreign culture, but by imposing a new personal meaning of existence that would result from the right dosage of autochthonism and cosmopolitanism, as the "struggle against alien life forms" can not stop with the "establishment of native life forms" (*Naţionalismul / [Nationalism]*).

The state and the political class should ensure the creation and maintenance of this organic balance. In analyzing how the elements that configure the historical identity of Romania are articulated, he reveals that between people and nation-state, between historical and political Romania, there are differences of experience, age, status and quality; he denounces the crisis of values which radicalizes discontinuity and makes it impossible to harmonize various forms of constituent diversity.

Thus, historical nationalism has nothing to do with political nationalism which Eliade rejects; in his opinion, "real", historical Romania has nothing in common with the weaknesses of political Romania and its leaders who compromised the *coherence* of Romanian identity. Although civic life was mistaken for politics, in Romania civility and politics have nothing in common: while the former is related to the life of the nation as a whole, seeking to *harmonize* the interests of all, the political reality is *fractured* between political parties and their opponents, while politicians have created destructive national *tensions* and compromised Romanianism internationally.

Eliade seeks the *legitimacy* of national values hierarchy in morality and spiritual fruitfulness: "True personality can not be confused with the vanity, pride, licentiousness and irresponsibility of today's leaders of the destiny of a whole nation", and his criticism of the political class lends itself to the virulence of Eminescu: *"To the first row they promoted all nullity, the unlettered, the chenapans of public life, all cheap consciences, all flexible backs, all the Levantine henchmen"* (*„Dictatura" şi „personalitatea" / ["Dictatorship" and "Personality"]*).

The solution could be the correction of this situation through a revolution of consciousness, in pursuit of a "Romanian renaissance". A Romanian Renaissance and the country's dignity could be achieved by replacing political concerns with civic ones. A non-political attitude would be equivalent to a non-violent revolution in contemporary society, where there is a gap between the life of the nation and that of the state. On the other hand, Eliade believes that the Romanians' "national instinct" throughout history has been more powerful than the class instinct, and so social revolutions occurred without bloodshed.

Like Lucian Blaga, he defines man as creator of culture, and man's purpose and greatness derive from his creative force. Peaceful reform seems to be understood as a *renovation;* "renewal" and "growth" in the spiritual plane aim a new ideology, while the artistic and philosophical creations involve an attitude and a heroic, manly model, derived

[6] More exactly, *1848-ism* – a Romanian noun denoting the spiritual atmosphere that surrounded the revolutionary year 1848 in the Romanian Principalities.

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from Papini. This position reconfigures *organically* the national cultural heritage by reference to orthodoxy and belief, "the only goal of the younger generation". For though a synthesis of ethnicity, culture does not produce "ethnic fiber" but spiritual germs developed by a religion (Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity) or a didactics (the study of texts, mathematics, philosophy), forwarding different spiritual positions of a people throughout its civilization (*Cultura / [Culture]*).

Confident in the strength of the spirit, in the ability of creative intelligence to transform historical reality, Eliade believes the restoration of Romanian dignity should take place primarily in people's consciousness. The duty of "great" people is to create and organize Romania, the country and its culture, while the duty of common people is to achieve "little things" related to citizenship in their everyday lives, in less formal circumstances: "At the moment you are asked to get down the tram at the front, to not spit on the street, to not receive tips, to not sell yourself to political parties, to not pass your kids through school by connections, to bring honor to your family first and then to the public gallery, to acquire a solid culture so that Bulgarians and Australians should not get ahead of us, to not say "Forget it!" whenever it is about a job where work and perseverance are required, and other small things like this " (*Criza românismului? / [Romanianism in crisis?]*).

The spirit of the "younger generation" who flourished during the 1922-1930 period claimed their difference by affirming the "values of the spirit", the integration of mystical experience into knowledge, the lived experience of fervent ideas, the spirit of adventure and desire for complete creative synthesis, by a new valorization of life.

Convinced that history is a cultural product, he believes that historical stages are "spiritual moments" that *do not manifest themselves evolutionarily*[7] but have always achieved new spiritual syntheses. *Mobility* generates a prerequisite of creation, *diversity*. The universal character of the valorization of life lies not so much in the "understanding" and adopting other cultural forms, as it does in its own original character. The option for *moderation* in this transformation process has its origins in the organicity of the constructive momentum of geniuses. Culture is therefore historically integrated into civilization and the moments of rupture due to abandonment of some cultural patterns by *grafting* others should represent the guidelines and focus of certain new directions that would fully restore in synchrony the mechanism of the other spiritual positions located in diachrony, configuring itself according to a *dynamic, fascicular* pattern on the vertical and a *reticular* pattern on the horizontal.

Eliade's Romanianism is beyond the shallow rhetoric of national "pride", which although legitimate, is likely to slip into barren sentimentality and self-sufficiency[8]; it is not to be discussed, but affirmed in all aspects of phenomenal existence, it is felt and lived by creation within Romanian premises, by deepening the national values and by finding the universal ones that the great creative personalities of the people aspired to assimilate perhaps without being aware of it. And literature reflects, summarizes and elaborates on criticism or extolment of a series of recent spiritual experiences and positions. So, for Eliade the problem of the Romanian soul is ontological before being historical, starting from the problems of being and of reality and reaching the Romanian being and reality.

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[7] cf. Sabina Fînaru, *Eliade prin Eliade / [Eliade through Eliade]*, 3rd edition, Univers, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 9-11.
[8] Andrei Pleşu, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

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In the article *Destinul culturii româneşti / [The Destiny of Romanian Culture]*, Mircea Eliade defines European cultural space from the geographical constant of landscape variety that would implicitly cause a spiritual dynamics in which also Romania is involved, located on its eastern borders. On the one hand, although geographical Romania belongs to Europe, its specificity lies in the quality of being a border area, which would define the "paradox of belonging"[9] due to the fact that there are three different cultural areas meeting here, which Romania both appropriated and sought to differentiate itself from them.

On the other hand, Romanian cultural space *is not unitary*, but *mosaic-like* and *polycentric*, due to the difference of spiritual structure and mental models in the three historical provinces: *I have hated Moldova because it is devoid of heroism (...) The sad fact is this: Moldova tempts the soul while Wallachia and Transylvania can not fight back with books that are the solution. We do not have heroic books (...) We do not have a book of ours, as Moldavian teenage girls have theirs (...) Moldavia has never understood, nor will it ever understand the values and impulses of virility. For a born-and-bred Moldavian - virility means bestiality, or presumptuousness or Nietzschean mimickry or misdirected cruelty, or pose, cerebral inferiority or emotional impairment (...) It is a gap between spiritual structures. They call us "Bucharesters", which means: tactlessness, boldness, interest, absence of ideals, lust for money, malice. We call them "of Jassy", "the meaning of which you know very well. Fortunately, Moldavia's daughters sometimes go into Wallachian bedchambers"* (*Împotriva Moldovei / [Against Moldavia]*).

From the historical point of view, Romania has caught the attention of Europe late in the "Aeon of nationalities", in the nineteenth century, having previously been confiscated for five centuries by adversities created by barbaric invasions after the Aurelian withdrawal and by the Ottoman Turks; its own goal was no other than resistance and its purpose in the universal plane was to save the West; its sacrifice, still uncapitalized on in Western historiographic consciousness was both of blood and wit, for the lack of spiritual tension due to the religious tolerance exhibited by non-European populations the Romanians came to grips with caused the closure, the internalization of the people's genius in pre-Roman, Latin and Byzantine spiritual traditions (*Destinul culturii româneşti / [The Destiny of Romanian Culture]*). These circumstances have led to several specific features and determined its major themes. The first would be the *delay* of Romanian culture, which was crystallized in two directions: religious and didactic, which should explain its *conservative* nature in an internal reference plane and its role as *savior* of European culture in an external plane. Written scholarly culture was *intermittent* due to the "terror of history" and only the creation of popular spirituality has been continuous and inexhaustible; therefore the two types of cultural expression coexisted and developed either in parallel or in interference[10], as cultured classical literature states the steady presence of folk art, hence the *accessibility* for all Romanians of all our literature classics in everything linguistic, lexical and thematic. It *extended folk creation*, created authentic values, but remained in the realm of *cultural provincialism*, which generated

[9] Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român / [The Romanian Paradox]*, Univers, Bucharest, 1998, p. 32.

[10] Sorin Alexandrescu states that "folklore exists in an eternal dimension, while written culture is manifested in a temporal dimension" and highlights their discontinuous existence in the vertical plane, coupled with a discontinuity in the horizontal plane, which originates in the break with Balkanic space that occurred in Romanian culture starting with the nineteenth century through its Western orientation, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

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a double spiritual attitude: one of *recovery momentum*, for assimilation and synchronization with the main directions of European literature, and the other full of complexes on account of its "minor" character[11]. Developing under inauspicious circumstances, written Romanian culture prolonged for three centuries the *medieval spirit* through books designed to "strengthen the soul of the people and the clergy's teaching" but was also able to provide creators of *encyclopedic stature* who helped it to integrate the great stages of European culture. Eliade is of opinion that the first four decades of the twentieth century made synchronization possible through the revival of religious thought in Europe and the "entry into history" of the peoples of Asia and the "culturally archaic" peoples; because of its substantiated solidarity with the horizon of folk spirituality, Romanian culture can creatively converse with these new worlds revealed to Europe.

Romanian culture has the ability to achieve, in its moments of grace, a balance between marginality and center, between Southeast European specificity and major European cultures. Romanian culture has the role of an (inter)*mediation* cultural space that helps to create new national and universal spiritual syntheses because of its very *marginal* position. The *dynamism* of Romanian creativity and its originality lie precisely in the power of assimilation and *synthesis*, the core feature of its intimate structure. The archaic character and richness of local values are derived from the participation in the ancient *center* of European culture and ensure their *spiritual openness* to non-European cultural traditions. Similar to Oriental cultures, Romanian culture communicates to Europeans an original spiritual universe, almost unknown, capitalizing on *"traditions born from Thracian-Roman spiritual syntheses that were accomplished over the centuries by the fruitful meeting of Rome, Thrace and archaic Christianity. In this part of Europe (...) have been preserved treasures of spirituality that were once part of the very heart of European culture: for Dionysian Thrace and Orphic Greece, Imperial Rome and Christian Rome, all met in this part of Europe and it was here their most important values were created"* (*ibid*.).

A space of spiritual *synthesis*[12], present-day Romania contributed to the establishment of "real Europe, not the geographical, but the spiritual one" (*ibid.*) and therefore its reintegration into the European cultural space would help to reconfigure its ontological and spiritual integrity: *"By a miracle, the seed of Rome was not lost after Aurelian's departure from Dacia - although this leaving spelled catastrophe for the people of this rich province. But can Europe afford this second departure from Dacia nowadays? As part of Europe, physically and spiritually, can we be sacrificed again without this sacrifice to endanger the very existence and spiritual integrity of Europe? By The history's future answer to this question depends not only our survival as a nation, but also the survival of the West"(ibid.)*.

[11] Eliade jotted in his *Jurnal / [Journal]*: "belonging to a minor culture, where dilettantism and improvisation are almost fatal, I entered the scientific life full of complexes, constantly terrorized by the fear of not being informed "up to date", p. 147.

[12] In *Încercarea labirintului / [Ordeal by Labyrinth]*, Eliade confesses: "I felt the descendant and heir of an interesting culture because it is located between two worlds: the purely European Western and the Oriental. I participated in these two universes. Western by the Latin language, and with the legacy of Rome in morals. But I also participated in a culture influenced by the Orient and rooted in the Neolithic (...) This creative tension is perhaps somewhat more complex to us, because we are *aux confins des empires morts*, as a French writer said", Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1990, p. 88.

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