THE CONCEPT OF SELF IN THE SEMIOTICS OF INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY, THE ETHNIC SELF IN POPULAR CULTURE

Stefan Lucian Muresanu
PhD. Student, "Hyperion" University of Bucharest

Keywords: identity, concept of self, semiotics, anthropology, interculturality, system

Motto: "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (Paulo Coelho, "The Alchemist")

1. Social Identity and indivisibility of traditional culture



Tangential, the concept of identity requires the interface of two research spheres in an attempt of defining the individual. A definition which in reality, it is located between the sociological and psychological domain. It is a very important study in the semiotics of intercultural identity which will test us, asking ourselves, at some point, what is *the meaning of social allegiance* and which is *in fact the individual side*, introduced in this definition. The individual is the ethnic entity that is under the research of the behavioral anthropology, actually of ethnology as part of the study of man during evolution and continuous development keeping up with the approached science and technique. Who says that man had a major evolution in the period where there are most of the scientific techniques is wrong. In each period of his evolution, man always enjoyed the material and spiritual product of that time's minds who have created and have increased the testimonies of the illuminated minds for the relief, understanding and defining the life's purpose:

> "The identity of a society is defined through the main symbols unanimous recognized by its members, signs, traditions, that give a meaning to the existence and it allows it to recognize them from a mass of individuals. The folklore express the cultural identity of the familial, occupational, national, religious, ethnic and area groups. It establishes connections between those who have things in common." (Ispas, 2003:33)

In this work, we also decided to approach, shortly, the process of formation the value attitudes, as well as the attempt of defining the concept of self, wishing, motivational, to approach, especially, some specific behaviors generated by the value limits. We wanted to capture the right elements of argumentations towards the value attitudes, but also the interrelation of some notions which appear, as motivational forces, to choose on behavior or another. Also, on the side of some sustained theories and deeply debated about the social action we highlighted, as much as we could, the theoretical mutual dependencies which, from the work's purpose point of view, we wanted to have a certain meaning. The truth is that,

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

through our construction, we are defined as beings that, prolictively, behavioral, and preferential related ourselves to the surrounding realities.



Anthropologically, social identity could qualify as an active, particular form of defining the individual in society, its position to fulfill the will of society. The man identifies itself as indivisible process, unique, creative and individualistic, oscillating in decision, apparently honest and mensurable by its interests. The social identity customizes the man and its defines him in society. He has the same nature as the one who lived during the feudal age, antiquity, or why not, during the Neolithic or Mesolithic. The difference between those two is the evolution of science and technique. They had the same desires, vices which today, we believe we can stop thanks to our social status, which the elevated man respects. In particular, the man is stubborn, we advance, in the so called advanced form of civilization, through collaboration, feelings attachment, ideas, conceptions from which are beneficial for society, and other destructive to our ways of obeying the laws. The laws which we make, we appreciate, agree with them and we try hard to obey. Laws are tools of stopping the man's *madness*, sometimes wrong in the way of trying to find some other type of freedom. But where is freedom and what is its meaning? When does it starts and where does it ends. Democracy is one of the so called ways of stopping the profane man going loose, but not the intellectual man. The profane wants to go through schools, because it is required by the social system, claims to have diplomas, yet he will always be dominated by a group, bad or good, in his evolution, an unconscious domination, and also a conscious destruction of the individual's social identity, manipulation. These are, actually, the one that lead towards perdition the human society. Weak and unprepared for life both professional and intellectual. Words are the matter of the well thought laws, not for everyone, but for a part of this world. The language skill is a secret of the gifted one who knows when to talk, but his speech is started from his cultured knowledge. Each one of us hold the obligation to know, in order to survive, the depths of our minds through the mother tongue, and its dissection to be healing:

> "The archaic- primitive mentality which establishes the tab, imposes a magical causal link between the talker and the specific object named by the spoken word. The conflict between the need of naming the object and avoiding the enunciation of the term that's naming it is solved through a autonmasic tabuistic transfer (anti – instead, onoma – name)." (Coatu, 2004:97)

In his loneliness, the one who is moving away from his mother tongue is not thinking it through, he is whining only for the hardship that is destroying, with his will, his identity. The



semiotics of the meaning, which studies manifestations of the human behavior, defines attitude as a conversion in society according to that social phenomenon. Conversion, by how we seek to define, is a form of what man desires in its existence, it could be hones or perverted. This process was also defined by the French symbologist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) who said: "behavioral semantics" and, in conclusion, he continues explaining that a behavior which could become through semanticizing a sign, is a "sign function" because, "literature (…) is perceived as a substantial language, deep, full of secrets, offered both as dream and threat (Roland Barthes, 1987:51) or a "ceremony" (Luis Jorge Prieto, 1975:129). "Any cultural system and any isolated act of social behavior", Maria Carpov noted in her work about culture semeiology: "it involves,

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

implicitly or explicitly, communication" (1978"161) which results in an exchange of messages, of a correlated dialogue and subjected to the predominant semiotic level of message transmitting. Through all of our daily manifestations we create literature, because we talk and transmit messages. The elevated form of communication contains in the message a certain system of signs, identified in each one's speech. Each of us have a personal experience which we transmit consciously towards the ones we talk to. The things we present in conferences, with very interesting and various themes, awake the intellectual spirit suitable for research, defines the elevated communication. Our being strives for this thing but it has been found that the ones who does not communicate cannot transmit the message directly and, then, leave through their behavior, attitudes, movements people to draw conclusions following only the body language and gestures. These days are much more appreciated in the social systems those who don't talk much, specifically for the reason that they do not stand against doing certain tasks, which most of the times are unpleasing, illogical and sometimes dangerous. Apparently, this form of manifestation seem peaceful. The body language, facial expressions, gesturing are signs of reading and discovering the individual's intentions, but also of defining, in a time, of its true identity. Words can decline the thinking and gestures can disturb looks:

> "The being in world does not have an attribute, a characteristic which man would posses among others, is the being of existence itself. This first way of being behave *the preoccupation* (Besorge); to exist means to be busy, to be tied to the world, a world which is here, like the being here of existence. This world is composed from things which are lately means (pragmata), procedures, means of itself to grasp itself and use through Desain as source of possibilities." (Ey, 1983:83)

The young generation of today, has customized this sign of social identity as a position that needs to have in society, by any means, an identity which tries to assure dignity and profit, using permanently the dictum: "you can't be humiliated, if you don't let yourself be humiliated". Humiliation is acceptance, stultification of the social position of the individual, loss of identity. The dictum has classified them as idolatry tools with a strong doubt in defining of the national identity. For them *national* means the ground of collectivity in which it can be identified as living. When I say *living* I mean all that human thinking mends the motivations in the spirit of cohabitation. Alexandru Tănase once said:

> "Widely spread is the also the tendency to subdue to civilization all the achievements and technical and material goods, yet considered in a perspective strictly utilitarian and hedonistic" (Tănase, 1977:125, Part II).

This statement is very welcomed because, thus forward, we can approach the idea of *civilization of pleasure delight*, which makes them feel praiseworthy when they describe scene of low ethics with a morality pushed towards the ecstasy of the sodomistic shadow. In his anthropology book, Edward Sapir mentions that the semantic kernel of culture informs about the existence of and "ensemble of attitudes, of views of the world and specific features of civilization which offers to a certain nation its original place in the world" (Edward Sapir, 1967:329). If this kernel does not have the resistance of mediation *of the specific features* then, the national identity cannot fulfill its role of defining factor for the community. The popular artistic creations are the fruit of the village people's wish to express their national identity, their ethnic membership in a special way of expression: traditional outfit, old houses with porches, mural painting and the wood one, representation of the saints, of the whole spiritual product define the spiritual and material patrimony of an ethnic community. These define its identity, a pride of the continuity in the history of the human civilization, a specific role decisive for the nations today's life.

2. National identity, meaning and structure in the study of behavioral anthropology

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

In this second part of the work we would like to mention a statement which the Romanian philosopher, Petre Țuțea, said in a televised interview: "Besides books, only animals and saints live: ones because they have no reason, and the others because they have too much to need auxiliary means of consciousness". The great righteousness of the philosopher we will find through all that means lack of culture and the stultification of the *concept of self*. The national identity starts to limit, for a part of the world, entered in a need of existence, sadly in an impressive number, a *disidentification* in a continuous growth, conscious denationalization done by the strong industrialized countries. But this happens only when upon the members of that nations the hindrance of migration establishes upon them, and the intercultural knowledge, of the comparison and conscious justification of it because only through comparison man can assess its identity. I asked myself, at one point, following the systematic destruction of national identity, in some ex-communist states, why is this action wished to be fulfilled as fast and as disastrous as possible for the respective nations, which are considered, by super industrialized states, "nations hard to lead". We don't state that this enslavement phrase of peoples appeared now, in our times, but from history many great leaders suggested it: Alexander the Great, Stalin and, in present, there are leader that circulate this idea of slow-paced destruction of old traditions of some peoples.

And, then, national identity, which is collective, a particular form of expressing a nation's values, cannot be defined as a counter measurement in the development of national identity, which is both individualistic and socialistic? Man is an element of nature, constructive and destructive at the same time.

> "Shunned by everyone, through my years i pass / Until I will feel my eye dried of tears, / Because in every man of this world an enemy is born, / I get to the point of not recognizing myself, / In pain and suffering my touch was petrified, / I can curse my mother, which I loved - / When the most cruel hate looks like love.../ Perhaps I will forget my pain and I could die" . (Mihai Eminescu, 1945:40)

In the evolution of man's identity, over time, two concepts have emerged: truth and value, which we find justified in responding to the development and evolution of man. Through truth, man succeeded in detaching himself from false existence, abiding by non-fulfillments through the purpose he self-created in the heart of his family, he ripped himself from what didn't identify him as desired in the face of the community and imposed value as respect. The value of man can be found in his consciousness, each and everyone wishing for more than they can give and is one is one of the great misfortunes of the evolution of human society for the better. Truth is objective, and the value of a subjective concept which, in modern society, blinds. Light destroys moss. In a study about value and evolution, in which I involved the students from the 1st year of The Faculty of Philology of the "Hyperion" University in Bucharest, we proposed to visit the National Museum of Village "Dimitrie Gusti". Together we noticed and researched, with great attention from the students, different settlements and old peasant houses in the Maramures area.

From the way the houses were built and ordained almost perfectly, the materials used to build those houses, then the machinery used in working the soil, the regulation of annexes within the household, we have defined the social identity of the owner of the house. As the main fact of the maramuresean villager is the concern about everything that identifies him, as a man, wishing the respect of others and even his towards himself. It is exactly what we will find in the studies of Luis Jorge Prieto concerning the so varied research fields of semiotics. In such a study, we identified the factor that also ensures the homogeneity of the semiotic space, the existence of the intentional index, i.e. the communicative signal. The maramuresean peasant communicated with the world through the way he organized his life in his household. There were visible signs of civilization and its evolution to the level he understood them. The senses of life were organized in his consciousness: house, household, family, future of children, ensuring a normal life. Through all of this, inherited as spiritual

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

and material values from his predecessors he defined his identity and through this his ethnicity. In his consciousness the material presence of place was vivid, of the estate and spiritually the realization that he is a romanian maramuresean christian.

In conclusion, the maramuresean man took hold of his cultural identity, native to the region in which he lived but also borrowed, meaning it was a form of imitation and addition that students noticed and transposed as a topic for discussion at seminars. I have been told that man is social, regardless from what place he comes, he develops and evolves.

The difference between "to develop" and "to evolve" is exactly the status which man desires from society. Social identity produces inversely the proportion of what could be defined as the primary development of man, which is normal, identified by birth and evolution as a result of the evaluation of one's own desire to overcome, interfering with the conscious competition of the social condition. Cultural man is the core of intercultural social, the pleasure of collaborating with others, of understanding and of being understood. As long as man is understood, it is justified that human existence in that community is given value to his identity. When it becomes incomprehensible, its identity is lost, but it gets another status, disruptive, and the only one that can revalorize it is society. It has been proven that language is the only source of truth by expressing hypotheses, suggestions and, when properly mastered, it becomes the superior force of identifying an individual in society, that is to say defining social identity.

Someone asked me once, why isn't everybody on Earth speaking the same language, because it would be more convenient in a lot of situation for everybody. At first glance, yes, but then when you sit and profoundly analyze the social phenomenon of social identity, the result is completely different and impossible. So it happened in history with the thracian language, it was spoken in almost the entire european continent. But, I believe the imposing of a language which is not native to you can produce serious psychological damage. And that language could never be learned accordingly by all the inhabitants of Earth, because of the large distance they are distributed.

Apparently, it can be believed that the usage of a single language on Earth is possible but, in time, zone-specific vocabularies will intervene, through generations new terms will appear, which ultimately will lead to new languages, further innovations that will not be able to quickly cover the large mass of speakers. In conclusion, regional inter- textual expressions will emerge, languages that will slowly become linguistically differentiated, and not only. What would seem to be common to all human culture are rites of passage, because all over the globe is dying, born, married, and here I would quote Arnold Van Gennep:

> "Their tendency to disposition is all the same, and under the multitude of forms there is always, either consciously or virtually expressed, a sort of succession: the scheme of rites of passage." (Van Gennep, 1996, 168)

In conclusion, naturally, no language could ever become unique for everybody. Isolation, due to the distribution of the population in hard-to-reach places, the distances, the immense distance covered water will make dialects appear, which will differentiate in time, due to the environment in which the individual will develop and evolve, acquiring a new ethnic identity. For example, Linné or Mendeleev may have discovered, through a genius intuition, a systematic hierarchy of empirical materials that is known to have been confirmed by an older theory. In conclusion, where our knowledge is indeed the result of research and experimentation, we must be careful not to confuse what we have learned empirically with what might follow from a theory, even if the theory is true.

3. Sign and definition of the self concept in expressing the national identity

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)



The reflection upon identity was always *the general problem of integrating the social agents in a social space*. *The recognition of a membershing* thought, when it was thought that everything was settled about the self concept, it occurred the *problem that these agents* were searching for *a specific place in this social space*, through differentiation, as a social status and singularization, as a fulfilled fact of some other's helplessness step to break from what, in reality, was representing their fear of being. Fright and fear are the two states of the unintegrated man in the being of tolerance and well manners, they have accelerated the fall into grotesque. Fright is a state that removes the profane from his identity as a man with the feeling that something physical can cause pain. Fear is the opposite of that state, of elevation of the mind compared to all the moves of the nature identified by the initial man as his spirit's identity. The man of letters ascends, dissects and meditate deeply into existence, defining itself, like no other, his cultural identity with which he organizes his own self concept. Identity is not a single face, because the man is a social entity, it accomplishes itself in the group activity and it defines itself through that group. The identity has appeared as an attempt of breaking of the self from some egos who were meditating very differently from what he wanted to define the situation of being. He will define and complete itself partially through the being's recovery in another way of existing of a community. In the forming of the social identity the family is the base yet not its completion. Each individual identifies itself in a way of communication, be it ethnic or social. And maybe, we don't understand that at its roots the world has started from a couple that has identified in the major time of evolution and its natural development in the community that has unfolded as the activity on the whole dry land of the Earth! The research identify and complete the man's science.

In one of his writings, the French sociologist Jean-Paul Codol (1944-1989) stated: "this major preoccupation - … is purely a conflict between the affirmation and the individual need and the affirmation and the collective need; between the search of a personal identity and the search of a collective identity; between what makes at the same time the individual difference and the likeness with one another; between the social visibility and conformism; shortly between the individual and the group" (1975:458). We can say that all these debates, very old as well in philosophy as in religion and ideology, as well as in psychology, have reached its highest point, at some point, with a preoccupation that has been amplified as opposition between what has been *the individual and the collective*, a report, even now located in the center of the social psychology. We can ask ourselves if there can be a single nation in Europe. But the answer will come as negative, because every nation is composed of people (ethnicities), which even them are made up of kin of people and as a core the primary family: father, mother, brothers and sisters, in conclusion, separate identities through culture, education, spirituality, teachings etc. The education can be the only one who can bring together socially the members of some groups, but only through a mutual education, with the same requirements from the individual, concerning language, which is essential in his identification, without trying to deteriorate or change the ethnical traditions that makes the national community (those remain in the conservation of the community from which the individual comes from. Then, the history of the mother nation from which the ethnicities histories must not miss, as an integrated part in making the world civilization. The Hungarian sociologist, Lothar Krappman, stated in an essay published in Budapest, in the year 1980, in the magazine "Szociológiai füzetek" that the "identity represents the performance realized by

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

the individual with the purpose of involving in the social mutual action and in community", a remarkable fact if we think, not at brainwashing with programs endangering the individual's identity, because this attempt destroys its identity and it provokes a counteroffensive in time, impulsivity towards its peaceful development in society because in each of us awakens, at some point in the subconscious, the awareness of the primordial ethnic identity.

In conclusion, the intercultural identity can be considered a stage of superior evolution of the man that can change, in the future, mentalities and can create new freedoms in the conscious evolution of the modern man, which the European citizen will need to understand them all the way. Interculturality means a methodology which wants the awareness of interrogation integration, the unconscious cry of what was, above the educational space of literature, psychology, anthropology, culture politics and history. The concept is not a new one, it just need to be made aware, created even since grade school once with the principles that are wanted to be at the base of the normal cohabitation between the people of the third millennial: *tolerance, equality, complementing values*. The value exceeds in the middle of any ethnicity in which culture means the way of affirmation of the society. The customs have their constructive base in the living of that specific ethnicity, customs need to be appropriated to the point where they not become hindrances towards ethnicity revaluation. Through all of this we will give the possibility of developing the spiritual specific of the local values, attaching them the general values of humanity. Yet we find that *multiculturalism*, as a real social phenomenon, still continues a misunderstood existence towards the interpretative grid and the deforming will of the social and political optimism. The intercultural identity is a conscious evolution in the middle of the European community which is deemed to be evolutionary and educative yet with no acceptance of any sort of ethnical ranking.

Regarding everything that was wished to be expressed in this work, we would like to end with the highlight that man, in his historical time, when he will reach to master self respect and discipline, then he will hold true power, that's why I think that in a future that will be a of a honesty and morality that will rule through an art of semiotics principle deciphering. I've always found interesting that underground game of tensions that have fueled the winding process of literary meaning genesis. Yet research have launched periodically, in the whirlpool of expressions, axioms that have seen in the literarity of the speech a special kind of emerging in the field o a continuity dimension, ruled by the two antipodes, or better said the two ideal poles: the poetic language, the one who excites through the charm of exposing ideas materialized through crafted words and, from case to case, the scientific one, respectively, the standard one, of the current communication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barthes, Roland, *Writing Degree Zero*, integrated essay of the volume *Book of writing. Anthology* ¸Bucharest, Univers publishing, 1987 (selection of texts and translation by Adriana Babeti and Delia Sepetean-Vasiliu, Preface by Adriana Babeti, Afterword by Delia Sepetan-Vasiliu;
Boudon, Raymond, *Treaty of Sociology*, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 1997;
Coatu, Nicoleta, *Metaphor and Folkloric speech*, Arvin Press Publishing, Bucharest, 2004;
Eminescu, Mihai, *Poetry (from life and posthumous)*, Lutetia Publishing, Bucharest, 1945;
Ey, Henri, *Consciousness*, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing, Bucharest, 1983;
Gennep, Arnold Van, *Passing Rites*, Polirom Publishing, Iasi, 1996;
Goodman, Nelson, *Introduction in sociology*, Lider Publishing, Bucharest, 1999;
Ispas, Sabina, *Oral culture and transcultural information*, Romanian Academy Publishing, Bucharest, 2003;

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)

Prieto, Luis, Jorge, *Sémiologie de la communication et sémiologie de la signification,* în *Études de linguistique et de sémiologie générales*, Genève, Droz, 1975;
Tănase Alexandru, *Culture and Civilization,* Political Publishing, Bucharest, 1977;

BDD-A27966 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:10:23 UTC)