

European Mentalities, in Mariana Boca's View

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Published in 2006 at Suceava University Publishing House, Mariana Boca's book *European Mentalities* proposes an original redefinition of the concept of mentality and projects a critical vision on the European man, from the perspective of the otherness, religious mentality and social-political mentality respectively. In the first chapter, called *Towards a New Europe of Mentalities*, the author analyzes the meeting between the autochthonistic and cosmopolitan mentality in Romania, pointing out that "... for two centuries the questioning of the European model and the European mentality has been at the core of the debates on cultural socio-political and economic strategies". (p. 11)

Mariana Boca summarily recalls the issue of *a people situated on the border* of an important area, with all the dramatic consequences accumulated throughout centuries of (often) tragic history: "History wanted Romanians to be born between two worlds, the East and the West. The Romanian people was formed on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. Today Romania is a *border state* at the edge of the European Union, a second Roman Empire, built on the modern principles of liberal democracy and social market capitalism, struggling from within to become a possible European Federation..." (p. 14). The author summarizes the subjective relations of the Romanians with the other Europeans, as they are placed in the collective memory, showing that the Romanians place the center of Europe towards the Latino-Germanic West, but claim an important connection with the center, because they are the last Latin people, located at the opening of the Slavic basin. Mariana Boca does not forget to mention both Romanians' frustration and exasperation when they are denied by the Westerners the historical condition of Europeans, and also their pride of being different, given their hybrid nature, resulting from their collaboration with the Byzantine-Eastern memory, from their proximity to the Russians, Poles and Ukrainians, from the special relationship with the Hungarians, but also with the Austrians, the Germans or the Balkan peoples. Mariana Boca connects to these historical realities and emotional experiences a tolerant type of Christianity of the

Romanians, the adaptability to very different lifestyles, combined with a radical conservatism in their habits and in their way of perceiving existence.

In her analysis, Mariana Boca takes into consideration two very different commentators on Romanians' connections with Europe, Mircea Eliade and Eugen Lovinescu. They followed two directions, both opposite and complementary. Drawing a parallel between Mircea Eliade's Romanian prophecy and the Dacian-Thracian memory claimed by him, with Eugen Lovinescu's anti-Orthodox Europeanism, radically attached to Western intellectual memory, the Europeanism expressed in the *History of modern Romanian civilization*, Mariana Boca sets her own vision on a critical, lucid line, anchored in the dynamics of today's society: "Europeanism was forced to second the influence of autochthonism in the 30s-40s of the last century, and under communism it took the ostracized face of the forbidden, censored or vaguely tolerated attitude. Today it is taking full revenge. Eugen Lovinescu, the father of synchronism, is the most visible leader of this direction, since Mircea Eliade, and has entered the public consciousness. In the European vision, the Dacian-Thracian memory has had no major influence on the modern Romanian civilization. Only the maximum value of the Latin fund and the "touch" with the European West is claimed. For Lovinescu, as for all pro-Western Romanians, including today, Europe is synonymous of the West..." (p. 26). The author shows that although the European geographical area includes both worlds, the West and the East, the European civilization, the European political-economic behaviour and the modern European state originate in the West; it is there that the primordial historical transformation takes place.

Mariana Boca manages to reconcile the two plans, in a personal redefinition of Europe, which she removes from the territorial materiality and leads to the immateriality of the spirit, memory and mind: "...before being confused with a determined territory, Europe is a mental map, populated not so much with countries and landscapes, but with ideas and values, with political and existential attitudes, with cultural phenomena and historical events, with myths and heroes, with religious revelations and social cataclysms, with social achievements, with consequential historical mistakes, with utopias and open ideals. Each of the inhabitants of geographical Europe, whether living in the East or in the West, is free to assimilate this European mental territory, to communicate it and to participate in its evolution. Thus, we speak of an inner Europe that we absorb or not through education and tradition, which we carry with us through adaptation and knowledge, through imitation and creativity. It is precisely the Europe of mentalities, as canonical as free in the dynamism of its psychosocial representations that composes the European cultural identity - pluriform, contradictory and yet unified, within the limits of the legitimacy that history gives it." (p. 22).

After highlighting the law of interdependence mentioned by Eugen Lovinescu, Mariana Boca concludes the first chapter of the book by presenting the examination of mentalities as a study of global interdisciplinarity. In the second chapter, entitled *Sources and mechanisms of mentalities*, the author defines mentality as a simultaneous product of a person's mind and as a product of the world known by a person, especially in childhood and adolescence, as a result of a psychosocial process based on exchange and negotiation: "Mentality is the result of an objective psychosocial process, based on exchange and negotiation. It is about the exchange of information between the individual and the society and the negotiation of the individual vs. society consensus, translated into norms - religious, economic, social, political, but also scientific, philosophical, artistic. The norm defines rational thinking and knowledge in Western culture even in ancient Greece, according to the principle of non-contradiction. The Western man should not contradict himself in his rational acts. If one should violate this rule, it becomes irrational..." (p. 55)

The author points to the theoretical difficulties she faced in conducting the study, because notion of *mentality* is as difficult to define as those of idea, emotion, feeling or thinking, although we often talk about it; very often we are not aware that it is the essential synthesis of the merge between every human being and the world he knows throughout his life: "...mentality represents the dynamic sum of meanings and interpretations given to all human experiences. This living core of meanings legitimize and compromise, construct and deconstruct the rules of life, the socio-cultural and religious norms, as well as the particular representations through which the human being reads the facts of life and which simultaneously give rise to events. There is a continuous exchange of information between the individual and the world, especially on the basis of experience. During this process, the mind of the individual tries to "negotiate" the senses received from the outside, especially when he does not understand or accept them. Exchange and negotiation mean, in this psychosocial context, the transformation of the senses and interpretations indicated to the individual by the direct experience into a personal mental product" (p. 58).

In the third chapter, named *In search of a method of describing European mentalities*, Mariana Boca chooses three research methods: the social representation defined in Serge Moscovici's terms, intertextuality and comparative thinking. The second part of the book, focused on the fourth chapter entitled *The European Man*, critically interprets the European position towards otherness and its history (*Meeting with the Other*), the religious mentality of today's Europeans and the dominant manifestations of the social and political mentality in Europe.

Mariana Boca's approach is brave, as it comes in a territory little known by the Romanian researchers and which requires teamwork: "The study I present to you is an individual enterprise. Working alone in the field of mentalities is, as Americans say, a great challenge, seductive as it is in meeting the land of promise. The promise that the researcher makes to herself is almost reckless. She hopes that, upon completing her analysis, she will be able to formulate a series of legitimate answers, if not to all, at least to some of the questions that arise today in the minds of many of us. Who are the Europeans? What are the European values? How is the typical European? Is there or not a mental pattern of European identity? What distinguishes a European from a non-European one?..." By a synthetic hypothesis on contemporary European mentalities, the author presents several original answers analyzed with well-constructed arguments. "Inevitably, such a hypothesis favors meanings and interpretations to the detriment of others, chooses certain analytical paths and eliminates all the others, is exposed to fragmentation and reductionism.", as stated by the author herself. However, there is also a generosity specific to the synthetic studies that of opening the way for the reader towards a unifying message, in this case towards a concrete image of the European mentalities. Noteworthy in Mariana Boca's study of is her effort of reaching a synthesis, the ability not to get lost in particular details and interpretations, and last but not least the original vision on the idea of mentality and on its expression in today's European mind. The book *European Mentalities* is a remarkable contribution to the current study of mentalities.

Mariana BOCA, 2006, *Mentalități europene*,
Suceava University Publishing House, 214 p.