

Vasile Boari and Sergiu Gherghina (eds.), *Weighting Differences: Romanian Identity in the Wider European Context*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, 272 pages, ISBN: 978 1443810012

Book review by Ionuț Constantin Trăistaru*

In an era marked by accelerated globalization and extended European integration, there is an increased tendency to overlook the national identity. This topic, of major concern for scholars especially after decolonization and disintegration of federal states (e.g. USSR, Yugoslavia), continues to reveal unknown facets when studied in the environment of contemporary challenges. In such a framework it is embedded the volume edited by Vasile Boari and Sergiu Gherghina, which focuses on Romanian identity and puts together the contributions of relevant scholars. The multidisciplinary character of the book, ranging from anthropological and historical to political science and economic perspectives, allows a more comprehensive approach of the subject. The goal of the editors is to provide answers to a few interconnected questions about the essence of Romanian identity, the historical development of the main features of the Romanian people, and to what extent existing identity perceptions share behaviours. All these issues are examined within the broader European perspectives, the reader being thus confronted with a general multi-level analysis.

These lines of reasoning are also indicated by the clear structure of the book that is divided in three logical-deductive parts, each of them with four or five contributions. The first part theoretically discusses the multi-level identities with two main directions of investigation. On

the one hand, the substantive elements of identity models and crises are debated from two different perspectives – economic and moral – by Daniel Dăianu and Vasile Boari. On the other hand, identity is analysed at three interconnected levels - ethnic, national, and regional – each of them with specific implications (Mihai Spariosu). The second part narrows the analytical spectrum from transnational to national level, emphasizing types of identity concern (Adrian-Paul Iliescu), particularities of nation-building and development (Toader and Simona Nicoară), and conceptual dilemmas (Gabriel Andreescu). The final part addresses the Romanian case in detail, combining qualitative (Virgil Ciomoș) and quantitative (Sergiu Bălțătescu) perspectives. The analysis is not limited to the territorial borders, but it transcends them in the attempt to shed light on attitudes of the Romanians abroad. In this respect, the historical and cultural perspectives about the position occupied by Romania in Europe, belonging to Ioan-Aurel Pop and Lucian Boia, are complemented by an in-depth look at the Romanian Diasporas in the United States (Andrada Costoiu).

The book is a useful reading and a relevant asset for the literature on Romanian identity for at least three reasons. First, given its multidisciplinary approach and extensive information included in its 13 chapters (plus a thorough introduction), it is a valuable source of knowledge for students and

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researchers interested to conduct studies in the field. Unique points of view and analytical frames are provided and carefully explained in deductive-nomological reasoning throughout the entire book. Moreover, original data are provided through interviews, in-depth comparisons (e.g. Aziliz Gouez's contribution), and statistical techniques. In other words, the rich descriptive and analytical insights are supplemented by exhaustive evidence that supports claims and persuades the reader.

The clarity of the arguments, the coherence of the book, and the accuracy of each theoretical and/or empirical analysis are the second major merit of *Weighting Differences*. Despite a broad spectrum of topics and choices of subjects, the book is connected by a clear-cut read thread (i.e. the Romanian identity) and the chapters are positioned like new bricks in a solid construction. As a consequence, the contributions complement each other and provide a broader picture that gets closer to the general aim of the book. To take only one example, the second part of the book starts with a theoretical underpinning on the types of identity concern (Adrian-Paul Iliescu). Practically, the next chapters reveal facets of this argumentation and lay them out on spatial and nation-building dimensions. Thus, the initial claims are strengthened by multiple evidence and new consistent arguments are brought to nuance debated concepts.

The third substantial merit is represented by the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to the Romanian identity. In this book, the extremes can be considered Europe – the broader frame in which the discussion is embedded – and the individual identity. The inclusion of diverse chapters allows the editors to move back

and forth on the continuum that results. Moreover, the reader has the opportunity to closely examine multiple dynamics of acquiring, modelling, changing, and shifting identities. When reading the book, students of anthropology, cultural studies, history, and political science can easily notice the commonalities of their subjects of study in approaching a highly-debated theme like the identity. Conversely, they understand that one-dimensional analyses are incomplete and cannot cover its complexity.

The volume not only reaches its goal by providing a few explicit answers to the initial questions, but also raises new question marks to be dealt in future studies. Of equal value there are the implicit answers that the reader can find by reading every contribution. Conclusions are both mentioned in the texts, but most of the times there are numerous logical linkages to be drawn by the readers themselves upon previous lectures. In this context, an advantage for some can be seen as a possible shortcoming for others. The multitude of theoretical points of view may prove inefficient for empiricists that would like to have the living proof of the mentioned ideas. A few chapters may justice in this direction and further studies can surely explore more. Summing up, the book is a valuable and enjoyable reading to be included in the lists of references of many subjects taught in universities. As the literature on Romanian identity is quite reduced in English, it represents a relevant starting point for future in-depth analyses on the topic. Its general and contextual approach helps both understanding the current dynamics and leaves room for alternative explanations to be consciously documented.