THE BRIGHT SIDE OF MONEY: A WEAPON OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The goal of this paper is to describe the way social identity is influenced by symbols people encounter in their everyday life. We studied the modern paper currency of all NATO countries, starting with the year 1960, over a span of 50 years. Our preliminary study reveals that the national currency has an important contribution to reflecting and promoting the peoples' national identity and it is also a variable of building/changing the population's values (political/ cultural/ religious/ historical). We can argue that, from a historical and relational perspective, money mirrors the ideology of a given period and it impacts society by promoting persons and symbols as watermarks on the paper currency. Our article dwells on the power of money, but we do not necessarily focus on its economic power, but on its capacity to become a tool for strategic communication within a nation.*

Keywords*: identity; currency; symbols; values; ideology*

1. INTRODUCTION

The connection between people and society is customized in various aspects of each individual's personality, such as the way we greet, the way we dress, in our artistic preferences, or in the types of behaviors we display. The fact that we are members of certain social groups indicates not only our belonging to a specific community, but the adherence to a set of values, social norms, beliefs and common behaviors. Literature has stored both studies of the specificity of the human being, i.e. of individuality as a stand-alone entity, and of the individual as a part of society - of the indisputable need of person to live in the midst of his peers.

This article aims at showing how national consciousness and positive identity are conditioned by the symbols circulated within the community. To put it differently, we will address the issue of consolidating / diluting national identity according to the particularities of the chosen personalities to be printed on the banknotes used by that state.

The hypothesis that we are advancing is that a country proud of its past and without major historical traumas will include in its panoply of figures personalities relevant to the historical becoming of that nation, while young states, or those that are unsafe, depending on their own historical trajectory, will choose, in particular, personalities with a neutral affective charge in the sphere of science and art.

2. SOCIAL IDENTITY

Each of us belongs, at some point in time, to different social groups, the category of affiliation being often equated with what Durkeim called "manners of doing, of feeling and of thinking". Such affiliation was highlighted by sociologists making up categories that establish the quantitative aspects of the individual's life (Dubar, 2003: 12), thus defending and evolving a series of cultural, demographic, economic or psychological invariants specific to certain social categories. Subsequently, concepts such as social identity, collective identity, and personal identity emerged from the polemics generated in this context.

Definitions of identity are diverse because identity is an ambiguous, elusive concept that can be approached from various perspectives, but impossible to be circumscribed to a sustainable definition. Deeply related to the spatial and temporal context in which they were elaborated, the definitions of identity represent variations of Heidegger's well-known starting point "The principle of identity sounds in a current formula A = A" (*apud* Constantinescu, 2000:149).

Henri Tajfel (1978) has the merit of initiating the study of inter-group relations from the perspective of classifying and identifying the individual with the group, an important result of his efforts being the emergence of the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This

particular theory states that as social categorization cannot have the effect of diminishing the self-image of individuals, people choose to identify themselves with social groups that give them a positive social identity. Henri Tajfel conducted several experiments which showed that there is a tendency to emphasize the similarities between entities of the same category (the phenomenon of assimilation) and the tendency to increase the contrasts between members of different categories (the phenomenon of contrast) (*apud* Chelcea, 1998:12). Taking on an identity that is common to that of the group determines individuals to maintain or establish consistency and consensus among the different aspects of common identity: similar behaviors, representations and attitudes.

Through the theory of self-categorization, John C. Turner (1987) proposes a complementary approach to the same issue. From his point of view, each individual acquires a self-concept that integrates several levels of abstraction: from very specific and personalized ego, to the general ego, similar to that of other members of the group. Categorizing the Ego by including it in a certain family of items determines the individual to acquire a certain social identity, and this identification justifies the person's expectations on the similarity of his / her views with those of the group. Taking the aforementioned as the starting point, the authors infer the following theoretical principles (*apud* Doise, Deschamps, Mugny, 1999: 43): (1) Individuals seek to maintain or accede to a positive social identity; (2) Positive social identity is largely based on favorable comparisons that can be made between the membership group and some other relevant groups. The membership group must be perceived as positively different or distinct from other relevant groups; (3) When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will seek to leave the group to which they belong to enter a more positive group and / or act so that their own group becomes positive.

Therefore, the individual's awareness of belonging to a particular social group and the valorisation of that belonging are measures of self-consciousness and positive grouping. The so often invoked desideratum of originality is, in fact, a way of recovering one's personal identity caught in the vortex of the indestructible bindings to the group,

> a conflict between affirmation and individual need and affirmation and collective need; between searching for a personal identity and seeking a collective identity; between what constitutes at the same time the individual difference and the similarity

with the other; between social visibility and conformism; in short, between the individual and the group (Cool, 1979:424).

3. SOCIAL MEMORY, SYMBOLS AND IDENTITY

Identity is a concept that remains actual, yet so complex and difficult to quantify, as it includes both the elements of differentiation from others, and the plethora of similarities with other members of the group. French sociologist Claude Dubar has distinguished between ways of expressing personal or social identity in self-standing languages. He showed that the attempt to "make" a system of unitary concepts linking the social perspective (ethnicity, culture, heritage, nation, class, family, service, religion, politics) to the personal sphere (the self, the intimate, the subjective, the love, the work, the faith) was a process of trappings, ambiguities and uncertainties (Dubar, 2003: 214).

Social identity and, indirectly, national identity, are dynamic processes that are either fueled or sabotaged by the historical and social contexts that the group experiences. Myths, folklore, or symbols are all examples of identity markers that condition the magnitude of possible changes in the sphere of social identity. The suppression or limitation of personal or group identity (professional, religious, national) or, on the contrary, identity consolidation, is impossible to understand in the absence of the discourse on "identity markers" or "identitials", respectively

> attributes defining the individual's personal identity as a unique entity (the set of qualities and defects), and its social identity (social status, nationality, gender, profession, religion) (Chelcea, 1998: 14).

Adams (1984:218) noticed that these identity markers can also be analyzed from a constructivist perspective and he stated that

> In the hands of certain individuals, at one point, myths can be created or radically changed through a design…we can have a collective vision and create the society we want (*apud* Chelcea, 1998:14).

Nevertheless, collective memory is not limited to myths, but also includes national creation, official memory, private memory, oral history and written history, the transmission and reconstruction of tradition and values, the memorial and the national myth, the specificity of the group being determined by the combination of these elements. Collective memory is a "lesson", an example of a profound

nature that converts into family images (Neculau, 1999: 179, 183).

In his introductory study in "The Politics of National Identity", historian John R. Gillis noted that "the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory and vice versa" (1994: 3). Identity is the "hard core" of personality, supported by the remembrance of how we have previously perceived other people, society and values. Similarly, the community voluntarily recalls only those images that serve the representations it has about itself. Oblivion is what lies over the rest.

Thus, our identity changes to a certain extent (Chelcea, 1998: 14). Identity and memory are two correlated concepts that feed on each other and are constantly restructured under the pressure of history and society. Interactionist explanations point out that people associate different social objects with meaning, and then interact with each other based on the meanings they have built up through social interaction (Blumer, 1986).

Maurice Halbwachs (1926, 1941, 1950) includes in the mainstream of academic discussions the concepts of framework, mechanism and the emergence of social memory, emphasizing that the national memory involves certain stages and mechanisms of evolution. After creating a generic image, the reverse process of symbolization takes place, i.e. when a particular image engages a whole structural framework: e.g. the evocation of symbolic figures is the means to establish the "illusion of eternity" (Neculau, 1999: 184).

In support of the social memory theory, Andre Micoud (1991), in the introduction to *Les Hauts-Lieux*, shows that "singular places" publicly celebrated by communities play a "catalytic role" by developing an "enthusiastic consensus of interests". The symbolic spaces invite to a "different future", through manipulation of the tradition in favour of change, detaching the example of the trivial background surrounding it. The funerary monuments, the necropolis, the ossuaries are excellent "loudspeakers" of memory. The memorial and the national myth, as monuments of memory, pass on values and preserve tradition as constructive forces. This affective and valorizing function gets new dimensions in relation to social groups: social memory forges both identity and coherence, and also the distinction (moral, cultural, intellectual) with other groups.

The past recalled in memory is a sustainable resource of identity, a "program for the present" (Schwartz, 1996: 910). In the light of European experience, the nation (in the broadest sense of the term) is a community of political worship, having as its object the worship of the territory and history. An analysis of the content of patriotic songs, as well as the national anthems of the European states, supports this idea; all of them make references to rivers, landforms and, in all of them, the common origin is invoked and the past is glorified.

Researchers of collective memory prestige consider that in recent decades there have been major changes in the memory recall mechanism of past images. Some nations, becoming safe and prosperous, have refreshed their collective memory; others seem to have forgotten the past. In any case, there is a personalization of memory, a constraint at local events, a democratization of it (Chelcea, 1998:19).

4. RESEARCH ON NATO BANKNOTES

While national particularities may appear in a host of identity elements, symbols are the ones that tell a story about what is important, valuable, valued and defended by the community.

Money is an ideal tool for transmitting the values of the society in which it is used. Each banknote tells a story about its country of origin. A banknote usually includes a figure or a country-specific feature on its front, and an item describing the activities of that community on its back; the front and the back images are typically related. For example, Aurel Vlaicu (Romanian engineer, inventor and pioneer of world aviation) appears on the front of the 50 RON Romanian banknote and on the back a sketch of one of his airplanes, Vlaicu II, is used. Money provides us with clues about the political regime, the level of culture and civilization specific to that community at various significant moments in its history. For example, before 1992, Albanian banknotes described activities specific for the population such as: harvesting, working on site or in steel factories. By the end of the 20th century this changed and the new banknotes displayed important historical figures that have helped the development of the state. This can be interpreted as a commitment to the future and a statement about the desire to raise the level of education. Money highlights the hierarchy of social values, which is visible through the association between the value of the banknote and the personality that is depicted on it. In Romania, the national poet, Mihai Eminescu, appears on the most valuable banknote, the 500 RON one. Similarly, before using euro, Austria had positioned Mozart on its most valuable banknote - 5000 schilling. The more important and the more famous a person is on an international level, the higher the value of the banknote that he or she represents is.

The important personalities of a community can be chosen from extremely diverse areas - political, military, religious, artistic or scientific. In order to strengthen its Catholic affiliation and to highlight the ethnical affiliation of Pope John Paul II, Poland introduced the 50 zloty banknote in 2006, with the portrait of the Pope, and on the back of the banknote, a cardinal kissing the Pope's hand. This series had a commemorative message dedicated to the Pope, after his passing away in 2005. Most monarchies, as well as other states that have undergone a revolutionary transformation under the influence of some people they regard as national heroes, chose to impose these effigies on all faces of banknotes in circulation. Although the country has a democratic regime, all Turkish banknotes depict Atatürk (Kemel Mustafa), considered the Father of the Turks, transmitting a message that Turkish elites assumed his way of civilization and secularization of the whole people. Likewise, in the case of the monarchies, (Great Britain) the emblematic figure of the Queen/King is found on all banknotes.

We advance the hypothesis that the lack of continuity in the symbolism of money signals a turning point in the history of that country. In this context, the existence / absence of historical personalities in monetary iconography has no significance in itself. There are states that assume a civilizing role and a cultural or scientific identity with which they pride themselves. For them, the lack of historical figures as monetary symbols does not have a special significance. By analyzing the banknotes that precede the adoption of a single currency by European countries, we can find numerous arguments in support of this hypothesis. Before Austria adopted the euro, its civilization impact was underlined through the promotion of painters, actors and writers. Similarly, the Kingdom of Belgium deviates from the tradition of other monarchies that paint the figures of kings on all the banknotes and makes room for personalities from the field of painting or music. Spain and Italy choose to celebrate important figures from the realms of science and culture.

Other countries, such as the United States of America, are proud of their past; therefore, they constantly remind people about their historical symbols. As long as the symbols remain the same, no historical turning point is signaled. The alarm signal that can indicate either a positive or a negative change occurs when countries include or remove from the specific iconography one dimension or another. In 1919, Finland elected its first president, Kaarlo Juho Stahlberg, who would also appear on one of the future banknotes. Finland

illustrated its money through a mix of historical and cultural personalities – the balanced and solid European path for this country, which has become a model from many points of view, including education, was signaled through its money. In Bulgaria's case, we can notice the addition of personalities with the value of symbol coming from different areas: representatives of orthodoxy (Paisii Hilendarski), famous names (Desislava of Bulgaria, referring to the second Bulgarian Empire) or their national hero (V. Levski). Hungary uses historical figures on its banknotes - King Matias, Ferencs Rackozi (who campaigned against the Habsburgs in Hungary), Robert Karoly (King of Hungary and Croatia), Istvan Szechenyi, Gabor Bethlen (curiously, this Hungarian prince tried to unite the Romanian Principalities under the name of Dacia). It is worthwhile pointing out the continuity of the symbols used by the communist Hungary and the contemporary elites - the iconography used suggests constancy in the ideals and objectives of the country and the perseverance in achieving them. Similarly, Poland has promoted significant persons of the state on the front of their banknotes, predominantly from the military field (perhaps a reflection of the tumultuous history of the country), but also to highlight its glory moments during the communist era (K. Swierczewski - General Bolshevik, J. Dabrowski - general of the 18th century, national hero, T. Kosciuszko - national hero in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and in the United States). Choosing a symbolic personality for Poland, and also for the United States, at a time when the country was controlled by the Soviets, offers clues about the Polish collective mentality, the (un)obedience of the elite of the time. Boleslaw Chrobry - the first king of Poland - appears on the most valuable banknote. After a short period of iconographic neutrality, Poland redeemed its historical personalities, including Boleslaw, but also King Kazimierz III Wielki, Vladislav II, or King Zygmunt. In Ireland, the political changes recorded in 1989 led to unprecedented economic growth, which determined the people to give the country the nickname of Celtic Tiger. Interestingly, since 1992, Irish money has included historical figures such as Queen Medb (Maeve), Douglas Hyde (Ireland's first president). Through its money Ireland declared its statement for national self-affirmation.

5. ROMANIAN MONEY

The history of Romanian banknotes is in line with the previous considerations. Adopted by the Parliament on May 4th, 1867, the elite of the time

assumed a currency which they named *leu* as a way of asserting independence from the Ottoman Empire; at its origin, it was the Dutch *leeuwendaalder* that had been used in Romania for more than 100 years. Romania's independence allowed the National Bank to decide on the design, value and issue of banknotes by the law of 29 April 1880. At first, the iconography of the Romanian banknotes included political and historical symbols. Subsequently, the transformation of Romania into a communist state influenced the symbolism of money. After 1947 the first signs of the new communist regime appeared, although the elements of Latinity and the traditional images of peasants remained. During that time, on the most valuable banknote, 100 lei, one could see the symbol of the unity of all social categories valorized by the regime. Later, according to official propaganda, traditionalist images were replaced by some that evoked the industrialization and modernization of the country. Symbolic achievements, such as "Casa Scânteii" or the Danube - Black Sea Channel, are included in the symbolism of banknotes. One can notice a syncretism between art and history on Romanian money, as they used the portraits of the Romantic painters Theodor Aman and Gheorghe Tătărescu to portray the image of Nicolae Bălcescu and Tudor Vladimirescu. Changes in Russian domination were also reflected by banknotes in use. "Casa Scânteii" (of Russian inspiration) was replaced by the Romanian Athenaeum. In the communist years, Romania rediscovered its own history, inserting its great leaders on the banknotes in circulation. The revolution of December 1989 inaugurated a different stage - no historical personality regained its place in the symbolism of the national currency, replaced by prominent figures of culture and science. Does this express a drifting identity? A fear of assuming national history? In April 2018, journalist Janina Necatara launched the "Women on Banknotes" campaign, through which historical figures, such as Queen Maria, Ana Aslan, Ecaterina Teodoroiu or Maria Tănase, were proposed to be printed on banknotes. The campaign is being conducted online and the person to get the most votes will be proposed in a petition to the Governor of the National Bank of Romania to be printed on a banknote. The campaign is based on the idea that Romanian women have left their mark on history and, as such, they should be represented accordingly.

6. CONCLUSIONS

A banknote can say many things about the country that issued it because it contains a specific visual story. Contact with a banknote produces a first impression of the country it represents, including how popular its symbols are (when that personality is easily recognized). Thus, the holder has an involuntary instant access to the country's past. The indispensability of using banknotes to meet daily needs makes us keep in touch with the culture and history of the country, and their simple sight can stir up powerful feelings and national values in us.

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