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Individual and Collective Identity between 1918 and 2018[2]

Abstract.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, nationality was the most important element of collective identity, but it already heralded an era of decline of this collective identity. The assertion of the individual and of their rights as well as the disappearance of the seduction exercised by the great ideals brought two great challenges: *What is the principle of solidarity (collective identity) according to which a community is organized? How can societies with a diluted collective identity meet non-conflictingly with those with a strong collective identity?* The answers are still to be discovered; we only have reference points. What we can say for sure is that it is very tempting to revert to the former strong collective identity, but it only generates bigger issues than the ones it seems to solve. We consider that the care for the only available world, the reflective assumption of options of collective identity that were previously self-evident, the cultivation of "capillary" ties between individuals with different collective identities and defining a public space meant to develop the specificity of the individual, without breaking the solidarity of the community, are among the landmarks that indicate the direction of the answers to the challenges mentioned above.

Keywords: individual, modernity, collective identity, hyper consumption, leaving modernity.

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Introduction

This paper is a reflection on the changes of the individual and of society as a result of a shift in the relationship between the collective and the individual component in personal identity within the last century. We used as references Zygmunt Bauman's view of postmodern ethics, Gilles Lipovetsky's perspective on consumer society, Charles Taylor's outlook of the individual, Daniel Dagenais's analysis of the transformation and of the end of the modern family, and Nicholas Taleb Nassim's perspective on change and fragility.

The premise we start from is that the identity of each person has a collective and an individual component. The collective component is given by the different groups to which we belong (family, nation, religion, profession), while the individual component is given by its own way of expressing and integrating the diversity of events. In traditional societies, the collective component was overwhelming, sons and daughters took over the parents' occupations, and this determined everything. The individual, as it is defined today, did not really exist, and his/her possibilities of choice were very limited; even the choice of the spouse, which today is exclusively personal, was determined by the position in the community of the future bride and groom.

The thesis we support is that in the relationship between collective and individual identity is one of the important issues of the West and that resolving this tension will provide the benchmarks for two extraordinary challenges: confronting the meaninglessness of its own citizens and confronting societies with a strong collective identity.

Affirmation of Individual Identity

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, collective identity was almost the only identity of man. The source of this identity was, after all, the divine. The world order here was legitimized by an extramundane order. It has the claim of universality and thus becomes exclusive. Therefore, the ones who are different must obey or be eliminated. Perhaps the most important challenge of modernity has been to allow the peaceful coexistence of individuals with different faiths. The reason was the answer to this challenge, an intramundane but ultra-subjective (human) court, since its laws do not depend on the subjects in which it manifests itself.

Individualization and rationality provided the principle of solidarity in modernity, the beginning of which also meant the beginning of societies made up of individuals with an identity independent of the conditions of tradition, social hierarchy, etc. Classical modernity (17th century–20th century) favoured both personal individualization and that of nation-states,[3] the two entities strengthening each other. The nation-state was the main source of collective identity, national affiliation remained out of the question, and social identity determined the role of the individual. Transfers between classes were rare; the individual had to play the role in which society distributed him/her even if his/her freedom within this role was much greater than that of a mediaeval peasant or craftsman.

Following the transition from classical modernity to postmodernity, the capacity of institutions to provide identity landmarks decreases. Institutions of any kind, from the nation-state to trade unions or the family, lose their influence, which had only been partially recovered by the new institutions (multinational economic corporations and superstate political structures). Uncertainty is even greater in the former communist countries, where the circumstantial transition from communism (where institutions ensured a very strong collective identity) to democracy is added to the trending transition from classical modernity to postmodernity.

In modernity, the individual endowed with reason sets the world in motion, progress becomes the law of new times, and reason provides the individual with the universality necessary to overcome traditional peculiarities. The other authorities are discredited, the physical and social worlds can be explained with the help of reason, and outside of them there is only ignorance and superstition. Religion is accepted and recognized because it helps to balance the individual and society, but it is an attitude already outdated, useful only to those who have not emancipated themselves in their time. Divinity is a premise that the modern world can do without. Cohesion is ensured in the *public space*, the conceptual meeting place of the citizens, and the norms of the community are exclusively rational.

Reason, although it follows the truth, leads to violence. The violence of reason derives from the claim of a part to be the whole, from the claim of reason to be the whole reality. Romanticism reacted to this claim and sought authenticity and harmony in the discredited areas of existence (the imaginary, the unconscious, even the absurd),

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[3] In this context, the state resembles an individual.

in search of a better relationship with otherness, but the relativization of all landmarks definitely compromised the idea of basis. The foundation of a community and its meaning are arbitrary from now on. The only one who can arbitrate something is the individual, but his/her authority is fragile and questionable. Is it, therefore, legitimate to ask *to what extent can the individual rely on him-/herself and the rules of society?*

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*,[4] Charles Taylor identified three major anxieties that the individual of Western societies must face: individualism, the rule of instrumental reason, and the impersonality of social organization. The three are linked and begin with the emancipation of man from the roles and moral obligations that society imposes on him/her, with the liberation of the individual from the "great chain of being"[5] in which humans had their place, which will lead him/her to concentrate on the self. What seemed like liberation turns out to be loneliness, the great ideals are emptied of meaning, and man loses touch with nature, which, if it has nothing sacred, becomes only a material resource. The long-term consequence is its destruction and the flattening of individual life under the rule of instrumental reason. Market laws and the bureaucratic state tend to spread everywhere. Civil rights and individual initiatives should balance these tendencies, but, as Tocqueville pointed out, people have a relatively easy tendency to be dominated by a large, anonymous power, and thus people become powerless in the face of the Leviathan state.

Why has the expected liberation become loneliness and submission? – because the initial liberation was set in motion by a moral ideal of authenticity, but the freedom gained is now manifested in an unfavourable environment, neutral liberalism, a liberalism that refuses attachment to a moral ideal although liberalism is the result of such an ideal. For today's Western society, the problem is not that the individual does not sacrifice his/her interests for the community but that there is a contradiction between the individual's desire to assert him-/herself and the interests of the group.

Taylor believes that tension arises from changes in the way the individual understood him-/herself. At the beginning, the individual asserted him-/herself out of the desire for authenticity, out of a moral ideal, and therefore an ideal that takes community

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[4] TAYLOR, Charles (2003): *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard University Press.
[5] The expression quoted by Taylor describes a hierarchical and rational universe, which lent its name to a book written by Arthur O. Lovejoy, in which the link between the image of a physical universe and of the metaphysical perception of the world is shown.

into account. Today, however, it asserts itself in a deviant form, that of the individual who no longer recognizes the legitimacy of the demands that others have on him/her and who is unable to recognize a reality more important than him-/herself.

> "The worry has been repeatedly expressed that the individual lost something important along with the larger social and cosmic horizons of action. [...] In other words, the dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society. This worry has recently surfaced again in concern at the fruits of a 'permissive society,' the doings of the 'me generation,' or the prevalence of 'narcissism,' to take just three of the best-known contemporary formulations. The sense that lives have been flattened and narrowed, and that this is connected to an abnormal and regrettable self-absorption, has returned in forms specific to contemporary culture."[6]

Exaggerated individualism, the rule of instrumental reason, the atomization of society and the submission of the individual to the Leviathan state are inevitable risks of modernity that we cannot avoid by a method that makes them impossible but by realizing that they are a path along which the individual will lose both his/her authenticity and the openness of the community. The solution would be to take responsibility for the uncertainty and discomfort due to a state of permanent discernment in order to remain an individual attached to the community and in order to acknowledge that nature is a man's home. Another solution would be not to surrender to the comfort of allegiance to the Leviathan state. This permanent struggle is the very condition of the culture of authenticity in which nothing is won for good, only this battle.

When the individual got too close to selfishness, society reacted with a nostalgia for the old period of collective identity imposed by an external court. Authenticity, nonetheless, remains an attractive ideal that leads to evolution but also to tension. Destructuring communities or families is a consequence of this tension, which is often unacknowledged or not assumed. A continuous struggle may be both the problem and the solution because freedom (the main gain of this period) implies the permanent possibility of the wrong choice; so, the best option is to exercise judgment:

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[6] TAYLOR, Charles (2003): *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard University Press. 3–4.

"The nature of a free society is that it will always be the locus of a struggle between higher and lower forms of freedom. Neither side can abolish the other, but the line can be moved, never definitively but at least for some people for some time, one way or the other. Through social action, political change, and winning hearts and minds, the better forms can gain ground, at least for a while. In a sense, a genuinely free society can take as its self-description the slogan put forward in quite another sense by revolutionary movements like the Italian Red Brigades: 'la lotta continua,' the struggle goes on in fact, forever."[7]

The Individual à la carte and Consumer Happiness

The constant struggle is a requirement that few comply with, most of them following the paths that seem safer even if they lead nowhere. After the fall into obsolescence of the rational and disciplined modern age, personal fulfilment remained the only motivation that mobilizes the individual. Yet, it does not manifest itself by increased care towards building a character but by a hedonistic aesthetic and in a consumer society by increasing choices of the products or of the services that we purchase. Identity is built by belonging to different micro-groups, and personal fulfilment becomes equivalent to individualizing consumption, from specific products to therapies, meeting groups, or personalized diets. Attention to the "I" corresponds to a neglect of public space and transcendent values. The result is, however, not the expected one, a stronger self. By looking only after oneself, receiving a very large flow of information, without a communication with the other, the self becomes more hesitant. Neglecting the external otherness leads to the formation of an inner otherness, and thus there occurs a break between the conscious and the unconscious. The disappearance of major points of reference also leads to an increase in the importance of everyday events and of secondary options. In addition, concern for self-security leads to a decrease or to softer forms of violence, but the self feels more and more vulnerable and threatened, not so much by unpleasant events as by the possibility of them happening: "insecurity is the inescapable equivalent of an unbalanced and disarmed individual who amplifies all risks, an individual obsessed with his personal problems […], traumatized by a sort of violence s/he knows nothing about".[8]

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[7] TAYLOR 2003, 78.

[8] LIPOVETSKY, Gilles (2007): *Fericirea paradoxală.* Iași, Polirom. 288. The translations of all non-English quotations are my own throughout the article.

Myths coexist non-violently in a highly individualized society in which even mythologies are personalized. With the sphere of influence reduced to an individual or to a micro-group, myths no longer generate violence because that would need a social space to take place, a space that is now neglected. The worlds that I propose and which I support do not need to be grounded in cosmogonies that apply to the entire universe. In fact, the universe of the individual is shrinking, and what is beyond it is no longer of interest. Moreover, this personalized "mini-universe" loses its consistency, just like the individual who inhabits it: "The process of personalization […] favours abnormal behaviours, indifferent to the principle of reality […] in line with the dominant narcissism and its correlate, the real transformed into an unreal show, a display of shallow exhibition […]. As a consequence of the decommissioning of the great social ends and of the primacy given to the present, the neo-narcissist is a vague personality, deprived of inner structure and of will."[9]

The solution is based on the following reasoning: if reality is where conflicts occur, then it must be relativized until its consistency disappears. Thus, no one will invest power to impose their formula, i.e. violence, in a reality the importance of which does not go beyond the action area of a micro-group.

The freedom of superficial identity is based, however, on two opposing attitudes of modernity. On the one hand, it can be applied only in economically developed societies, and this is possible only through the efficiency of rational techno-science. On the other hand, it needs the relaxation and relativism allowed after the romantic rehabilitation of non-rational areas of existence. They would ensure the re-enchantment of the world so that the individual of optional identity can benefit from the advantages of the rational attitude towards the world and feel at peace with the cosmos without questioning the incompatibility between the exploitation of reason and the existence of a cosmos. Superficial attitude is not necessarily the expression of a weaker individual. Zygmunt Bauman believes that in postmodernity individuals manage to cope in such a fragmented and mixed-up world that the great principles confuse rather than help and chain rather than release:

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9   Op. cit. 298.

"Human reality is confusing and ambiguous and so moral decisions, unlike abstract principles, are ambivalent. This is the kind of world we must live in and yet, as if to challenge the worried philosophers who cannot conceive morality without principles, a morality without basis, we demonstrate day by day or we learn to live and we manage to live in such a world although few of us are prepared to answer, if asked, what principles guide us, and even fewer of us have heard of the 'basics' without which, apparently, we cannot manage to be good to one another."[10]

Bauman's perspective is optimistic; he trusts individuals and their morals that would manifest themselves even in the absence of a code of ethics. At the basis of this morality, there is a moral impulse that makes us look after *the other, our brother*, who, following Levinas, is prior to the subject because the subject itself is constituted by this impulse. Morality would thus precede ontology, so what gives the individual a sense in caring for their peer. However, this impulse may be lacking. Cain, who did not consider himself his brother's guardian, also lacked it, and this is why he killed him. If the individual does acts of morality in the absence of ethical codes, s/he will not be determined by a constitutive moral impulse of the subject but by the emotions and interests of the postmodern individual, argues Gilles Lipovetsky in *Le Crépuscule du devoir. L'éthique indolore des nouvelles temps démocratiques*,[11] where he argues in favour of the persistence of a moral behaviour even in the absence of a conscience of duty. The moral order is less and less influential. Nevertheless, chaos is absent but the motivations of our actions change. It is not duty to the other or to society but soft individualism. Good deeds are done for the pleasure of the individual (acts of charity are no longer done out of duty but for the sake of well-being of the individual). A kind of unconscious ideal connects the fulfilment of the individual with that of the community in the family and in society. What drives the behaviour of the individual is the hedonism accessible to all in the consumer society. The individual is set in motion by seduction, which regulates consumption, information, education, and morals. *Á la carte* seduction sets society in motion and reshapes it according to "a systematic process of customization whose work consists, in essence, in multiplying and diversifying the offer, in proposing you a huge variety of

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[10] BAUMAN, Zygmunt (2000): *Etica postmodernă*. Timisoara, Amarcord. 37–42.
[11] Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

offers [individual consumers] and in thus making you take more buying decisions [...] Life without a categorical imperative, kit life[12] modulated according to individual needs [...] of independent formulas that the unlimited offer makes possible, this is how seduction works."[13]

The result is maximum individualism conditioned by the dissolution of the bonds between the individual and the community, dissolution felt as liberation. But this liberation is only illusionary insofar as the individual integrates into a crowd as an atom, not as an individual.

> "Far from being an agent of mystification and passivity, seduction is a *destruction tool* of the social through a process of isolation that is no longer administered by brute force or regulatory framework but by hedonism, information, and accountability. […] The postmodern phase of socialization, the process of personalization is a new type of social control [s.n.], free of the cumbersome processes of massification –reification– repression. Integration is accomplished through persuasion, invoking health, security, and rationality."[14]

Personalization set in motion by hedonism leads to an individual different from the modern one: instead of the subject that is built through education and observance of categorical imperatives, instead of the citizen subject of the social contract, *Narcissus* appears: the individual who identifies with his/her body and psyche. The relativization of landmarks does not weaken the need for authenticity so that the individual body and psyche are the only legitimate, authentic providers of identity. They will bear the burden of identity, bodies will be tattooed, stripped or "sculpted" to express personality, and the psyche will be probed and subject to experiments in search of deep layers and experiences that correspond to them. The finality of the public space also changes together with the individual. It is no longer a place for debate and decision, but it becomes a stage for expressing personality. The *audience* is no longer represented by

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[12] *La vie kit* – in the original; it refers to life assembled from different parts, as a user makes a computer or furniture from the various parts that are on the market so as to be as close as possible to his preferences (*our note, IMP*).

[13] LIPOVETSKY, Gilles (1983): *L'ere du vide*. Paris, Gallimard. 27.

[14] Ibid.

the peers as a universal instance of individual rationality[15] but the citizens of the show society in which everyone is both protagonist and spectator. However, it is a passive protagonist as the identity is expressed through customized choices from a list of options already given. Postmodernity becomes hypermodernity, and the citizen becomes hyper-consumer. Consumption no longer satisfies only material needs, as it is the case of the classical consumer society, but also the spiritual needs of personal fulfilment and happiness. In hypermodernity, art, wisdom, and ways of life become commodities, and citizen participation in public life no longer means participation in politics and economics unless the latter increase trade.

The dominance of *media* and *advertising* makes the hyper-consumer have a different reflexivity compared to the modern one. In addition to the loss of the connection between the process of knowledge transmission and character formation diagnosed by Lyotard,[16] the establishment of hyper-consumption comes with its own influences.

The reflexivity of a subject whose identity is constructed by seeking originality in consumption options is different from that of the subject which is formed following a model and rules that help it to internalize external rules. Superficial identity involves a lot of information, the hierarchy of criteria, and the comparison of products, which require a high degree of reflexivity given that even sexual affiliation or lifestyle can be chosen. However, being related almost exclusively to consumption, reflexivity is determined almost entirely by advertising, which, naturally, has purposes external to individuality.

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[15] In his answer to the question *What is Enlightenment?*, Kant said that enlightenment needs only the most innocuous freedom, that of public use of reason, best illustrated by the scientist who exposes his/her ideas to the public (as opposed to the private use of reason exemplified by an officer or clerk who has placed him-/herself in the service of a hierarchical institution with an already determined purpose). "The public use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one's own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public. What I term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular civil post or office with which he is entrusted." (https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/what_is_enlightenment.pdf; accessed on: 25 September 2018).

[16] LYOTARD, Jean-François (1979): *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit.

If something makes sense only because it enters the desire–consumption chain, if anything can eventually become a commodity, then you can buy the finished product in areas that until then could only be reached by going through certain stages: wisdom is bought in books with formulas and examples, the talent of negotiation is obtained from a book that convincingly presents rules of negotiation, and happiness is easily achieved by mastering principles that help the individual to reach authenticity and self-harmony with the world.

The past is present in the current options only through a kind of capillarity of desire, thus being too little part of *à la carte* identity, an interference of the actual authenticity.

Focusing exclusively on the end result together with the pressure of advertising has much greater influences on children to whom advertising is addressed as adults with the discernment already formed. Consumer society and unrestricted education for children form a system. One of the effects of this education is that children lack the necessary rules for mental structuring and for the formation of reflexivity.

What is left of the spiritual relating of an individual whose reflexivity lacks a collective identity from which to distance him-/herself and in which to include him-/herself, deprived of the dimension of history and the slow speed of becoming mature? The relation to the sacred, as it is codified in the great religions, is incompatible with the society of hyper-consumption. The revival of religious movements is determined by contact with civilizations with lower secularization rates or is a response to new market conditions. From a religion of salvation in the afterlife, Christianity has become an activity for good living in the world here. Hyper-consumerism did not mean the death of Christianity but the instrument of its adaptation to hedonism. The trade with pilgrimages and religious objects is growing as people need the external confirmation of some meanings that they no longer have within. What gives power to religion is no longer God but its ability to provide well-being. The depravity of the world or the breaking up the whole is not a concern for the individual in a world that no longer integrates into a whole; for him/her, life and his/her own identity are like a *jigsaw puzzle* with pieces that constantly need readjustment. This is the only situation that the society of generalized consumption allows.

For the beginnings of modernity, happiness was synonymous with progress. Discrediting progress confuses the postmodern citizen who no longer knows where to

look for happiness. "As soon as man gets rid of community obligations, his/her systematic concern for happiness can only make his/her existence problematic and unsatisfactory –this is the destiny of the socially independent individual who, without collective and religious support, faces the trials of life alone and unarmed."[17]

The solution remains consumption, hyper-consumption being the only way of life that the West can offer and which will not be interrupted by the outcasts who challenge it because it is too strong and because there is nothing else to put in its place. In order to be changed, other stronger interests are needed, but they are not yet visible.

Hyperconsumption does not mean that man will limit him-/herself and will only want to live for comfort. Lipovetsky has two arguments for this reassuring conclusion: the developing sciences that require rigour and self-transcendence and the fact that open society favours creation, innovation that at some point will manifest itself through ways other than consumption.

The Disintegration of the Modern Family

Family transformations, as presented by Daniel Dagenais,[18] are a good example of changing the relationship between collective and individual identity. The family today refers to so many situations that we can no longer speak of a single family model. According to the Canadian sociologist, the de-structuring of the modern family model began in the 1960s when the family was denounced as a trap through which impersonal society uses the individual, luring him/her with marital happiness so that s/he can dedicate his/her energies to perpetuating society. In order to find his/her freedom and to find him-/herself, the individual annuls the legal and social conventions of the family, but through this s/he him-/herself suffers an identity crisis because these regulations were part of his/her identity. Man does not have a Nature that would grant him authenticity in the absence of Culture, i.e. of the norms created by him, but which also created him.

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[17] LIPOVETSKY 2007, 296.

[18] DAGENAIS, Daniel (2000): *La fin de la famille moderne – significations et transformations de la famille moderne*, Presse de l'Université Laval.

"There is a *sui generis* modernity of the family, an integral part of Western modernity [...]. The universalization of identity (not just the simple empowerment of the person), a true ideational agent of modernity reshaped the whole family in all its aspects. Neither the intensity of the subject's amorous investments nor the reorganization of gender relations and parental roles nor the importance acquired by the child's education can be explained by the autonomous desires of the individual who would aim, virtually, to free him-/herself from any contingency. But because it is this dynamic of the West that has reshaped the family, it means that the current transformations imply the end of modernity.

Because these changes have such deep roots, one cannot hope that once 'liberated' from modern legal fictions Man will return to his own feet, renewing, so to speak, his true anthropological foundation. Maybe legal fictions are constructed, maybe family deeds are cultural and therefore variable, yet Man's being is related to them, is supported by these social forms in such a way that when they collapse, Man has no Nature to lean on, and then everything becomes possible.

[...] It seems that modern fiction is deeply rooted in people's identities as well as its deconstruction [of fiction]."[19]

The man with a universal identity is the ideal that has guided the formation and development of the modern family for two centuries. The child's future is no longer linked to a social environment that has decided his/her profession, but it stems from the universal identity of the individual. The family free from its economic and social functions aims to raise children who will leave it to start other families. It is re-established with each generation, starting from the parents, who have equal roles.

The mainstream in sociology and humanities in general considers that the disintegration of the nuclear family is a continuation of the process of modernity, of the liberation of the individual from collective ties and identities. Dagenais believes that the modern family is in solidarity with modernity and with the individual that it has produced (the subject).[20] This is seen in the differences between courtly love and modern love. The mediaeval knight loved the qualities of the Woman in general in a concrete

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[19] Op. cit. 13–14.

[20] Dagenais's book generated such strong reactions that the journal *Argument* of Quebec decided to dedicate him a whole dossier (http://www.revueargument.ca/dossier/31-autour-dun-livre-la-fin-de-la-famille-moderne-de-daniel-dagenais.html).

woman. The concrete woman in flesh and blood mattered only insofar as she embodied an archetype – this was the object of the knight's adoration. Modernity breaks away from this kind of love because modern identity is different, and no role completely exhausts a person's identity, s/he being always more than those social roles. "Subjectivity is the way of self-consciousness of a universal being condemned to be recognized in its public life only in a truncated form, depending on a certain role it plays."[21] Subjectivity is not the personal part that s/he leaves at home when s/he goes to work or the irrational or sentimental part of a being that is rational in social relations; subjectivity is not found as a bearer of universal qualities or as a possessor of goods but expresses itself through them. Subjectivity occurs through all social roles, without entirely existing in one, so reflexivity is needed in order to understand and to hold these roles together. The modern subject composes all its facets in a personality that, however, no one recognizes as such, not even the parents – they see in the child only their work; they see in general what society sees. It will take the delicacy of love for a subject to be confirmed by another individual.

What is specific to modernity is that recognition is demanded and offered by subjectivity. The universality of man makes the identity of each man more abstract, only in love does he have a specific recognition, a special identity. Love becomes the maker of the world in the sense that the two constitute a world. Although there was a long conflict between modernity and the church, the latter exerted an important influence in the formation of the modern family by emphasizing the consent of the spouses and the transformation of relations between men and women through their spiritualization. In Puritan families in America, love was a condition of marriage because God told the man to love his wife.

> "First of all, we cannot claim that the religious investment of the conjugal sphere would have served in the end only to prepare the ground for the establishment of romantic love, the only form of modern love. Love marriage is not the emancipation of religious marriage, especially since love is comprehensible starting only from the category of autonomous individual."[22]

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[21] DAGENAIS 2000, 156.
[22] Op. cit. 175.

The Canadian sociologist's conclusion is that the changes of the classical modern family are not a transformation in the line of democratization of family roles (parents/children) or gender roles but represent a de-structuring that contradicts an essential feature of the modern family, subjectivity, that has taken on a role (male or female) in common life. Taking on a gender role means accepting one's own incompleteness and openness to one world only next to another, the man towards the woman and the woman towards the man, being both something similar and something different.

> "Being a man or a woman means accepting oneself in the depths of one's being. A world cannot be made up of oneself. The reverse of generic identity or its scope is, therefore, an immediate commitment to the world. From the archaic division of the cosmos according to a masculine and a feminine principle to the parenting of genders in modern society, one finds the same commitment to being oneself in a way that does not concern oneself but the world to continue."[23]

The rejection of gender roles will lead to the rejection of the world; the demographic decline actually expresses the distrust of adults in the world in which they live.

According to this perception, the family model is linked to the model of society, and the great changes of the modern family actually show us that society has changed:

> "We can call 'individualism' the force at work in today's world. But this individualism is radically different from the properly modern individualism which gave birth to a whole world. From this point of view, it is clear that modernity has prompted a characteristic type of family, irreducible to any maintenance of traditional mores: the educational family focused on the formation of the modern man, polarizing for this purpose relations between men and women. It is thus clear that contemporary practices must be understood as breaking away from this societal model."[24]

Dagenais too, just like Taylor, speaks of two types of individualism, modern individualism itself and today's individualism. The two differ depending on the attitude towards the gender role. The classical individual accepts it, thus assuming an external

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[23] Op. cit. 249.
[24] Op. cit. 252.

constraint in his/her identity, an otherness that does not alter him/her and due to which s/he keeps both his/her reflexivity and his/her openness to the world. When the individual rejects the assumption of the collective identity of gender, it means that society has changed well enough for the modern family to no longer have social support.

Novelty and "Narrative Error"

Both Dagenais and Taylor describe contemporary Western society as set in motion by a different individualism from classical modernism, a deviant individualism that would not ensure the coagulation of society or the autonomy of the individual. They both believe that a return to pre-modern positions of collective identity or even classical modernity is not a solution and that, in the end, the identity of tomorrow's individual and the rules of tomorrow's society cannot be configured now. Both relate only to Western civilization, ignoring societies in which the collective identity is very strong such as the Chinese or the Islamic ones. The collective identity of religion or nationality is increasingly diluted in the secularized and democratic states of Europe. At the same time, though, individual identities are becoming increasingly fragile and more and more attracted to societies with strong collective identities, from outside Europe and America or from their past.

A war that reconfigured Europe ended a century ago, but the political and geographical reconfiguration was the consequence of the reconfiguration of the relationship between the individual and the collective component of the individual's identity. Before the war, many of the most learned people were convinced that they lived in an almost perfectly organized world and did not understand those who wanted to change it; just as many were convinced that they lived in one of the most unjust worlds and did not understand those who wanted to keep it that way. The causes of the transformation of societies are often noticed only from the perspective of history; contemporaries do not notice them although they experience them.

In his book *The Black Swan*,[25] N. N. Taleb describes how we become narrow-minded when new elements appear in our experiences. He also describes our stubbornness to treat the future as a repetition of the past and the tensions that arise when reality

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[25] Taleb, Nassim Nicholas (2010): *The Black Swan*. New York. Random House.

has changed, but we continue to think and act according to the old views of the world. The Black Swan is a metaphor for a very unlikely event but with major consequences, an event that we could theoretically have known but which we ignore because our general perception of the world and life (*Weltanschauung*) differs from reality. This conception is, in fact, a narrative that integrates all the situations and events of an individual or a community. It is usually built on experiences and is vulnerable to new or forgotten experiences. When this conception consists of principles derived from theories, the risk of mismatch with the real world increases, and then unexpected events with major consequences occur.

Causality is not synonymous with determinism in all our activities because Luck or Bad Luck is very present. The causes that determine our current state or the results of our activities depend very much on Chance, but we tend to establish a direct proportionality between the "inputs" of an action (effort, skill, morality, etc.) and its "results", leaving us so easily caught up in the stories that put them all together that we systematically ignore the intervention of the *unlikely* which turns everything upside down.

This *unlikeliness* would be predictable if we set out to see only causal links; if at some point the configuration we have made about the world no longer fits the world, we keep the configuration with the help of the Platonic fold, a fold that covers the place where the image of the world and the world itself no longer fit.

> "Platonicity is what makes us think that we understand more than we actually do. But this does not happen everywhere. I am not saying that Platonic forms don't exist. Models and constructions, these intellectual maps of reality, are not always wrong; they are wrong only in some specific applications. The difficulty is that a) you do not know beforehand (only after the fact) where the map will be wrong, and b) the mistakes can lead to severe consequences. These models are like potentially helpful medicines that carry random but very severe side effects.
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> The Platonic fold is the explosive boundary where the Platonic mind-set enters in contact with messy reality, where the gap between what you know and what you think you know becomes dangerously wide. It is here that the Black Swan is produced."[26]

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[26] TALEB 2010, 24.

The Platonicity to which the author made reference is a "disease" insofar as we consider our idea of the world to be truer than the world itself, which leads us to ignore the world and the facts in it. This does not mean that the world would not have a spiritual foundation, that there would be no deeper, more subtle causality in which the Spirit is, of course, a source of free random decisions: "Randomness, in practice, is what we don't know; to invoke randomness is to plead ignorance."[27]

We live with the help of narratives, with a general conception of the world and life that gives meaning to all lived or imagined events, which captures them all in one inevitably reductive story. When experience goes beyond the story, we should adapt our story, but we usually do not because the story makes us oblivious to the new, and in addition we consider that changing the story would be the loss of previous experience and identity. The narrative of modernity is linked to the rational individual as the foundation of the rules of organization of society, a universal identity in which all individuals are found and which establishes common rules for all. In favour of this narrative linking democracy, liberalism, and rationality, Llosa wrote in *The Call of the Tribe*:

> "The 'Call of the Tribe' [...] is what Karl Popper calls the irrationalism of primitive beings that nestles in the most secret depths of all civilized people, who never completely overcame the nostalgia of that traditional world, the tribe, when man was still a part inseparable from the community, subordinated to the sorcerer or the almighty chief, who took all the decisions for him. In this world, he felt safe, free from responsibilities, obedient, just like the animal in the flock [...] or like the people in the crowd or group of similar beings, quiet among those who spoke the same language, worshiped the same gods and had the same habits, hating his fellow man, the different being over whom they could throw responsibility for all the calamities that befell the tribe. [...] In civilized countries, such as Great Britain, the call of the tribe is manifested especially by the great shows such as football matches or outdoor pop concerts performed in the 60s by the famous Beatles and Rolling Stones, when the individual disappeared swallowed by the crowd, a healthy and cathartic way to get rid of the daily servitudes of the citizen. But in some countries this call of the tribe, from which the democratic and liberal culture gradually freed us –ultimately rationality – had begun to reappear, at times, through terrible charismatic leaders because of whom the citizens become again the crowd submissive to a boss."[28]

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[27] TALEB Op. cit. 153.
[28] LLOSA, Mario Vargas (2019): *Chemarea tribului*. Bucharest, Humanitas Fiction.

However, this narrative is increasingly competing with narratives that emphasize either the individual (to the detriment of universality) or the collective identity (to the detriment of individuality). In the Western world, the individual challenges universality by refusing any uniformity on the one hand, while the individual leaves them seduced by narratives that emphasise the community on the other. Today's individual can be less and less found in the modern narrative. He can no longer return to the old narratives of collective identity, precisely because he will feel constrained by any solidarity imposed, although some individuals will be attracted, as by a mirage, by the security of unquestioned belonging to a community. He can no longer find new horizons because the precarious universality of modernity has already occupied the entire horizon.

Conclusions

The answers to questions such as: *What is the principle of solidarity (collective identity) according to which a community is organized? How can societies with a diluted collective identity meet non-conflictingly with those with a strong collective identity?* must not ignore the past, but they cannot rely solely on it. The brain is a machine of anticipation, and we make projections because we do not want to experience everything; we imagine some experiences, and in this way we "trick" evolution. We do not have to live all the experiences in order to benefit from the teachings of evolution. However, sometimes we are the ones being fooled because between our anticipation and reality there is the so-called Platonic fold. We put it aside every time we pay attention to the facts and when we train our minds not to fall for the comfort of the projections and causality created by it.

In today's world, collective identities no longer provide enough "reasons to live and hope",[29] and the void left by them is temporarily filled by the surrogate of consumer happiness, and the individual is too weak and too lonely to rebuild the web of meanings of the world. Happiness through consumption is not a new narrative in

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[29] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, Ch. II, pt. 31 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

which people find themselves but an attitude that only a relatively small number of people identify with. The absence of the vertical transcendence of religion and of the horizontal pseudo-transcendence of progress justifies the question: what narrative could bring together both the universal identity of the individual and his/her belonging to a specific community? Concern for the only available world, the Earth, can be the starting point for a new integrative narrative. Consumption leads to the global deterioration of the living environment and, at least for the time being, neither waste recycling measures nor alternative technology nor international programmes can stop this deterioration; so, we all realize that we are a humanity because we have the same House, in the most proper sense of the word. When people realize that they can destroy their home not only by war or by accident but also by their lifestyles, a sort of solidarity is born and a new relationship with Nature in the presence of which new narratives can develop. This new narrative articulates the new relationships between individuality and collectivity, between public and private, between specific and universal, between natural and manufactured, and between real and virtual.

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