

## *Personal Identity and Mass Culture*

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### **Summary**

Personal identities in Kosova, too, are created through the influence of the mass media contents. Ample and assorted technology-communications systems have facilitated the convergence of personal and collective relations in the social and cultural aspects. In addition, the personal identity has been tempted by the factors leading to the virtual shape. Fixed, retouched, and artificial identities created in a virtual environment through the mass media enhance the game of the cultural roles that are incompatible with the real life roles. The roles do not give but rather get from the public the un-systemized cultural energies and then pass on that power mainly to corporative representatives, which manage it by acquiring the public.

**Keywords:** *Personal identity, mass media, mass culture, multiculturalism, virtual, role, public right.*

### *Identity, Industry of Culture*

Mass culture has inverted the conventional concept of the personal identity, the one viewed narrowly in the traditional context, by linking it mainly with the authentic, original, and local values and environments, either geographic or social. The consumption of global values and global space of communications has led to a change of the major influence producing agents in creating of the opinions as well as the personal and collective identity. The media have changed the conceptualization of life. Images of actors in the serials inundate local and national televisions, and this happens be the case in all continents. Protagonists of the television serials live the kind of a life

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everyone years to have -- and they make no serious efforts to such an end.<sup>1</sup> Protagonists from the books no longer inspire even the children, but they are instead inspired by the mass media. Instead of reading, children find it more amusing consumption of media contents.<sup>2</sup> Communications have changed in form and content, and this is the case with all ages and in all of the continents.

The more the digital communications develop, the weaker will grow the emotional ties, not only with relatives, acquaintances, and friends but also with the nature, environment, and its products. Therefore, the scholars on tradition, as is for instance Raymond Aron, consider that one of the main reasons of the "origin of social differentiation is the disintegration of mechanical solidarity and segmental structures." All these add to the accelerating process of losing these ties.

Media have contributed to fading out of the authority, namely have led to subjugation toward the group led by a "chieftain, "headman" "family head", "teacher", "boss". The personal freedom is stimulated by the media, because they also lead to the change of the accountability patterns, from the moral to legal accountability, from collective to personal accountability.

Therefore, we are dealing with the situation of the departure of traditional authority by reconciling the responsibility with the obligation toward the public life. In this case, the mechanical solidarity, known as a unique and obdurate tyranny, which was very

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<sup>1</sup> Niel Postman, *Amusing ourselves to death*, Penguin, USA, 1985, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Over 30 per cent of children never read in their free time. Researches carried out by the National Foundation for Literacy in the United Kingdom involved over 21,000 children. When the research began in 2005, four out of 10 children confirmed that leisure reading was part of their daily routine, reports koha.net. The figure has now dropped to about three out of 10 children. The number of children who read comics and magazines has also dropped from 75 percent to 57 percent. Experts say that children do not read for entertainment as they increasingly see the reading as meeting school obligations. Researchers have also discovered that children prefer watching their favorite TV programs than read. (Over 30% of children do not read at their free time . Koha Ditore news portal, <http://koha.net/> 2014-08-31 23:40:17)

strong in Kosova given that fact that the majority of the population lived in larger family communities in the rural areas, weakened little by little, dominated by organic solidarity, namely through the increase of public accountability, responsible individuals, and unhindered public communication, including the media. If an individual lived in a social environment with stronger mechanic solidarity, then the responsibility for all happens, including to the particular person, delegated to the group and the accountability ends in the hierarchy of the group. Put in other words, in this level of organic solidarity, which was extensively treated by Emile Durkheim, the authority is not delegated to the group, namely "chieftain," "family head," "teacher", "cleric", "boss", but is held and communicated as an individual responsibility. In this case, the media pluralism also played a role of creating plural identities.<sup>3</sup>

Personal identity is the one that is tempted by the factors shaping the virtual construction, which is more a project and mysticism than a form of concrete content. At the same time, provision of opportunity to move beyond the limited space made an impact on the judgment about this model of personality. People share even the most personal and intimate actions with a world, eager to see and hear the extraordinary and unthinkable, which is the unknown and the wishful. The people with more than one mini-personality are influenced by public communications, since by changing the multiple mini-roles, they can remain as players who attract the interest of others, while those who like the public space, manage this game accurately to remain in the realm common opinions or cultural and social. On this point, we can refer to Erving Goffman's<sup>4</sup> anthropological approach on roles that people play. Namely, he considers that people perform different roles in social situations; with

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<sup>3</sup> Brian McNair, *Striptiz kultura*, Zagreb, 2004, f., 20.

<sup>4</sup> Goffman, sociologist and anthropologist, among others created the term "total institution," being it one of the first sociological examination of the position of the mental patients in the psychiatric hospitals and understanding of the social aspects of mental patients (see: Weinstein R. (1982). "Goffman's Asylums and the Social Situation of Mental Patients". *Orthomolecular psychiatry* 11 (N 4): 267-274).

their behavior they provoke the curiosity of the others; they reveal their self-identity as an interactive and dynamic process, meaning that they move along in quest for themselves and the "others" as well as the attributes that they did not have or do not have. Many of such people seek to find those missing attributes, and the good part of the story is that they do not stop questing and insist on that by having the pleasure of tasting "the exclusionary self-delusion." They will find their self-esteem if the authority recognizes their efforts.

To support this opinion we can also refer to Sherry Turkle, who noted that in dealing with the context of the consumption of the media contents each player can create many characters and participate in many games, his self is not only decentralized, but "multiplied."<sup>5</sup> So, it is the space without borders and the opportunities to play in this space with many characters, with many roles, with many dimensions, which are crucial to establishing interpersonal relationships in those communications group, and finally, in global media communications. It is important that these relations work to maintain the influence of the personal role in time and space, and during this dynamic process it is not so important if they are defined as concrete or virtual.

Social media are the most spread agents that have served to reshape the personal identity, because, by playing the roles in an informal and hazy field, with the prospects of presenting themselves the way they wish to be and not the way they are, individuals begin changing emotionally and consider that they convey this change to their interlocutors, including those who they have never known nor will ever know. Commenting in a broader context on the social networks, Spanish sociologist Manuel Castellás refers to the primary definition of identity, as an identity that shapes out the identity of the other, and is self-sustaining across time and space.

Mass culture personalities<sup>6</sup> closely link their potential which is recognized as a global cultural identity, with the level of acceptance

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<sup>5</sup> Sherry Turkle "Life on screen; Identity on the age of internet", Touchstone, New York, 1997, p 185.

<sup>6</sup> Mass culture defines the extent, totality, universalism, and limitlessness, all of them being ingredients of globalism. Media mass culture has been

by others, as an identity more virtual than real, that is, with fluid consistency in time and space. This is also associated with the mass culture, which also involves a lot of virtual spirit. After all, people have always lived in societies which across history were multicultural.<sup>7</sup>

However, if a more precise definition of multiculturalism is sought, it will be found in Canadian literature, from where it actually derived. This term came across for the first time in Canada, a country with many cultures, including linguistic, with English and French being the most widespread. "Multiculturalism," among other things, means coexistence within a common political society, a fairly large number of cultural groups, which, in principle, wish and are able to maintain their individual identity.<sup>8</sup> The deceptions occurs when, for instance, an active user of *Facebook* or other social networks thinks that, as a result of symbolic communication, he already had become very popular and respected through a profile that paves the way for him to take real action. Making judgments on the basis of virtual relationship has to do with actions that are not consistent with the strength and profile of an Internet user.

A model of this kind of disputable communication involve are the feature stories which may not be written by that specific internet posting them on the social pages. One good example of this can be political candidates seeking post who employ other writers to work as their communicators, by using certain names for personal communication. Creating self-esteem based on such prejudices does not match the judgment of the communicating "friends." Losing real friends and finding virtual ones, wraps up the process of living in the physical loneliness, which also affects one's personal identity. The society of loneliness or associating with the loneliness can be defined as a notion of not being associated, influenced by the use of the

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influenced by the global market because multi-national corporations produce and disseminate contents not only within certain space contexts for the whole mankind.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Raz, *Multiculturalism*, *Ratio Juris*, VOL. 11, nr.3 sep. 1998. f. 194

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 197

Internet, even if this has to do with to interpersonal communication. There is no dilemma as to what the differences between the physical communication and technological communication are. Avoidance of physical and social interactivity increases loneliness, because despite the fact that technological communicative seems to be quite social, it is not all-embracing because it does not offer all psycho-social dynamic values that a physical, eye-to eye, face-to-face communication offers. This form communication only adds up to the time spent alone.<sup>9</sup>

The modified, retouched, and artificial identity created in a virtual space is important also because it make it possible for game of the roles in terms of not appearing who we are, but rather how we wish to be seen by the others. It is all about virtual construction of the wishes, namely, a project of being "as much accepted by others as possible." As sociologists and anthropologists have noted, pictures, messages, emails, and different postings "allow us to present ourselves the way we wish we were."<sup>10</sup>

A man may live in two parallel worlds if he has no identity in the real world, and most likely such people seek to compensate the absence of identity with the virtual world. Democratization of desires and emotions assumed infinite dimension on the internet. Art and popularized culture (not popular) are linked to modernity and post-modernity. "Bad girls" are at the core of many films presenting the "pornography of culture." Does this relate to the emancipation of women; namely, the more a female is emancipate the more they are of stripper cultures.<sup>11</sup> Both geography and the content of the communications have created the technology notions and coherent social space, which were studied also by Gustavo S. Mesch. In fact, it is precisely the same and coherent interest that unifies to a great extent the communion subjects. The topics of communication and psycho-physical interests, as well as the social and cultural ones, make

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite, *the Internet in everyday life*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, UK, 2002, p. 227.

<sup>10</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together; Why We Expect More from Technology And Less from Each Other*, New York, 2011, p.160.

<sup>11</sup> Brian McNair, *Striptiz kultura*, Zagreb, 2004, p. 20.

these connections belonging to "common" but with divergent goals<sup>12</sup>. Animosities help conversion of personalities, as an experimental option between oneself and those who join the "friendly" community.<sup>13</sup>

The virtual life is mainly created with the intention of being invisible and self-projected, that is, creating a picture for the others, for those who do not know your past, and, of course, your relationship, starting with the actual one, without having an obligation to built it on facts and concrete realities. Summarizing the effects of the information technology in this aspect, in the context of Internet in particular, Sherry Turkle raises concerns and dilemma if the men will be able to cope with this direction led by technology. Technology is leading us to places that we do not want to go. Mass culture is part of the journeying system, and often it is precisely this activity that confirms the dilemma and concern raised by her.

The bid of an artists who wants to become part of the massive cultural areal is not clear, and the journey that he follows will take him there where he did not aim or did not even dream ending up. Until to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a local or national artist could hardly be seen by others in the way he wished to be seen. He had to make conventional steps, going, for instance, to Hollywood, to test himself if there was any chance to become part of the major film system. He was required to perform even physical activities that he hoped were sought there in order to be in contact with public art. This was also the case with the writers, painters, singers, composers. The communication technology, namely, media communication has broken that conventional lack of opportunity, and now the movements and key relations are realized through Internet networks, thus facilitating someone's start of the journey, which, of course, no one is never sure what it will be like.

The aspiration of the people to connect, to communicate, and to share thoughts and ideas, images and figures, wishes and dreams, which for centuries was done mainly through verbal way of

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

communicating and the in writing, has assumed unlimited dimensions. Owing to the connections' opportunities, the people who do not know one another become acquainted and develop ideal relations. No matter how these relations can be, they have changed the human being himself, making it more fragile and more illegal than it has ever in its history. Secrecy is it being made public, yet it continues to remains such, because there is always something unspoken, often essential, while on the other hand, there is glorification and dramatization of the things and facts that are not such, perhaps sometimes non-existent in reality. This is a new personal identity, which is similar in all corners of the globe, having the same stimulus and suppliers: the media, the social networks in particular.

Communication technologies have built small or large spaces; they have equated the rich and the poor, and at the same time have enabled a communicating journey to everyone who had yearned for that. People want to be with each other, but also to be connected with others in different locations. And this is precisely the mass culture relationship created in virtual space by sending messages from a local area.

The fear from this rich technology offer can easily be put into a question by losing the reason in terms of which communicator is the first and which is the second in this world of communications -- the one that gives or the one that takes, by changing the roles persistently. The emotional accommodation that technology offers can affect spiritual and psychological tensions, by making one depend on expectations and hopes, of what is not known where it is and if anything that is not completely clear comes up, what is that in fact. Such a communication, for many, is a synonym of Becket's drama "Waiting for Godot," waiting for a protagonist who may come but who may not be alive at all. This means that there is no such as a normal line of social or cultural reception for different categories that enter into communication without having a clear agenda or even when they have an agenda but are not fully aware of its contents, so they not know where it can take at the end. Even in this case, we are dealing with the loss of some personal identity values, and not having



them does not mean replacing them with the others perhaps better ones, but in most of the cases, such communicators remain in a lost and non-existent world and cannot figure out what is false and what is true. Those who understand and know how to guide themselves in these communications can prove that they have a standard and competitive preparation to become involved not only in public interpersonal relationships, but also through the media. But rational people maintain their personal identity; they avoid the possibility of uncontrolled spending of their time and their physical and mental energy. This becomes a norm, although some can keep the situation under control easier, while online communication provides an opportunity of ignoring other people's feelings.<sup>14</sup>

The multiple forms of communications that technology provide for an increase of alternatives of the conflicts within a personality, especially the consumers who are not prepared to select their quantity and quality. This, of course, adds to the sources of a crisis not only of an individual but also a group or a community. The example of the Arab Spring (2012) when authoritarian regimes were toppled (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt), but also the case of Bosnia (2013) where the young people mobilized through social networks and communication technologies to protest and articulate social demands, show that a substantial indicator, and this is the Internet and with it the social networks can now way be ignored.

One of the problems that arise in this relation of public roles, the cultural as well, is related to the unification of a group of individuals without knowing clearly what are those values that distinguish a group and if a person shares has similar values with the other members of the group. Quite often, understanding of the truth may lead to the split between an individual and the group. Betty Friedan<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Alone Together; *Why We Expect More from Technology And Less from Each Other*, Sherry Turkle, Basic Books, New York, 2011 p. 177.

<sup>15</sup>Betty Friedan, a leading figure in the women's movement in the United States in 1960s, founded and was elected the first president of the National Organization for Women, which aimed to bring women "into the mainstream of American society now in fully equal partnership with men".

recognizes the distinctiveness in the same affiliation, which allows the survival of the group even if some members do not possess the standard recognition, knowledge and behaviors, which makes them alike.

The media communication of culture may also add to the identity crisis, notwithstanding the fact they provide opportunities for easier and wider forms of expression. But, personal identity crisis can be transmitted and affect the community crisis. A community crisis stimulates more ideologies and options of conflicts in social and cultural relations. These relations are nurtured by "public right" to own the media authority over a subject, including social and physical ones. Culture theories have failed to provide an answer accepted by to this sudden change of the roles, which does not stop, but always involves a process of regrouping, even when society that has overcome the formal threshold, known commonly as a mosaic of peace and media-cultural iconographic. An explanation should be sought in the permanent changes that occur in the personal identity. Cultural patterns vary and cover one another.

No matter how homogenous the cultural publics may be and how they manifest this homogeneity through symbolism and signs, they are as agreeable as they are presented in relations to other groups. Always, one's identity, that is., a self, will be hidden there, carefully guarded, although the manifestations of this ego do not seem to be ever present in the individual identity in the sense of active collective identity.

In the case of the "public right " there is precisely the misunderstanding that is accommodated in the silent conciliation of the representatives, who are identified occasionally as if they were given by others, in good faith, a position to sacrifice the personal cultural values for the sake of the general cultural interests. Mass culturists benefit from this relationship. The inverted events, their appearance, statements, interviews and decorated imaged impose offer unlimited demands. Artificiality is imposed without respecting

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Her ideas about partnership between men and women were published in the book "*The Feminine Mystique*" (1963)

the reality and the cultural rationale. Emotions get provoked through an image that is more a design than physiology.

### ***Conclusion***

The roles do not give, but rather receive from the public the un-systemized energy and then give that power mainly to the corporate representatives, who manage acquiring the public. Roles vary because cultural personal identities change as well. In this way, an individual preserves the components of personal values by demonstrating publicly the consistency and lack of homogeneity in the group, the community. Otherwise, if it were fully conciliation between the personal and collective identities, there would be no changes and no shifting of individuals from a collective group to another, in an effort to prove that the source of their movement is exactly the inability to manifest the value and potential of personal identity. The mismatch of desires, personal and collective opportunities, leads to public abstention after detaching from collective affiliation and consciousness, and this inevitably leads, if not to reactions, to shifting of the group's attention.

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