



Book review

Constantin Schifirnet, *Tendential modernity*, LAMBERT Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken, 2021, 374 pp., ISBN: 978-3-659-26837-3

Eugenia Udangiu^a

^a University of Craiova, Craiova, Romania

The book of professor Constantin Schifirnet, entitled *Tendential Modernity – Reflections on the modern evolution of society* (Bucharest: Tritonic) was published in 2016. In 2021, a second volume was published as *Tendential Modernity*, logically and methodologically linked to the theme of the first volume.



CONSTANTIN SCHIFIRNET

TENDENTIAL MODERNITY



Reflections on the modern evolution of societies reveal the fact that theories of modernization have imposed a kind of *ideal type* in the Weberian sense, useful for measuring the progress made on the difficult road of social change. The countries of Western Europe are the closest to this ideal type for the fact that the *modernity* itself was born from the cultural and historical-geographical specificity of their area. We can say that it was the *primary* modernity, but still *tendential* towards the theoretical model.

In the rest of Europe and the rest of the world for that matter, we have *modernities*, not *modernity* because they are rather peculiar types of modernity.

^aEugenia Udangiu, Associate professor, PhD., Tel: 004-0741.119.459; E-mail address: eudangiu@yahoo.com

Their development naturally reflects their specificity so as, man can say that the non-western modernities are in their turn *tendential* to the concrete reality of the primary model. Starting from this theoretical premise, the book *Tendential modernity* focuses exclusively on the modern development of Romania and includes a series of researches published between 1997 and 2014. To facilitate the presentation, I have grouped the 23 chapters of the book according to the dominant theme , so:

Modernity and tendential modernity (chapters 1, 2, 3): The entire historical period from the reign of A. I. Cuza until today, is analyzed from a cultural, economical and political point of view and evaluated by comparison with the ideal-type of Western modernity. The results of the activity of the main social actors such as politicians, intellectuals, cultural and economic elites, as well as institutional actors, do not escape the critical eye of the sociologist who believes that Romanian society is in fact in a double simultaneous transition our days: from an industrial to a post -industrial model and from a premodern to a modern model. This paradox, along with other specific features of the Romanian society, makes our form of modernity not a clearly structured one, but rather a mosaic, with many particularities and few alignments with contemporary western modernity. It is therefore tendential to the prototype.

Tradition, religion and identity (chapters 4, 7, 8): the concept of *identity* is presented both from a static and a dynamic point of view. This means that the author presens extensively the perspective known as *essentialism*, accounting for the stable, structural component of identity, and the perspective known as *constructivism*, accounting for the processual elements through which identities are formed and convert. This major theme of religion, tradition and identity, as well as the manner in which it was approached by the author, seems to be the center of gravity of the entire work, offering at the same time one of the most appropriate reading grids of the book.

Europeanization (the rest of the chapters, of which, special chapters dedicated to education and intellectuals, media and public space, corporate responsibility): the idea of modernization and that of Europeanization overlap only partially. They must not be confused because Europeanization also implies internal adhesion not only external compliance. How could concrete individuals, belonging to their national spaces and cultures, invest whith significance an impressive supranational construction like the European Union?

The answer is not at all easy and the author reviews the current debates on this topic and the many aspects of the problem: external territorial borders and cultural frontiers, the development of capable and coherent political institutions to coordinate the entire European space, the decentralization of national governance systems, the delegation of increased authority to regions etc. Professor Schifirneț warns us that in fact Europeanization does not mean absolute Westernization because even the countries of Western Europe have significant cultural and political differences. They can only be packed under the same label in a very general and simplified approach. The temptation to fully and uncreatively take over a simplified and "ready-made" model is very great, but this strategy would not produce "European countries" but only European peripheries. Will Romania - the author asks - be a periphery of Europe or a national community with an European development? His answer relies on Romanian creativity and originality, on the accumulated stock of knowledge, to make the transition from imitation to innovation, developing a viable endogenous model.

Professor C. Schifirneț's book is not an easy read in which you can easily navigate, but it is interesting and challenging. I tried to group the abundant information into the three

big topics I have already discussed, taking as a guide the author's emphasis on one aspect or another: modernity, identity, Europeanization. The paradoxes that living history can bring to the social foreground and which the author points out throughout the entire work, deserve a special mention: Romanian culture is *modern* through its *pre-modern* aspects; there is a simultaneous transition from *industrial* to *post-industrial* and from *pre-modern* to *modern*; we have *modernity* without *modern man*, *capitalism* without *capitalists* and without *capital*. These paradoxes can be read and understood in two different, but complementary perspectives: a sociological one, predominantly critical, which measures the distances between reality and the *genuine model*, being it the theoretical or empirical one. The second perspective is an anthropological one and values these paradoxes as signs of a creative acculturation, when they results in a successful reciprocal adjustment.

Received 12 September 2023, accepted 02 December 2023.