CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN EUROPE:
FROM NATIONALISM TO MULTICULTURALISM
AND TRANSCULTURALISM

Carmen ARDELEAN[1]

Abstract

One of the key terms in the last decades, multiculturalism is perceived as a critical approach to the peaceful coexistence of different cultures within the same geographical areas. Multiculturalism, as a concept, has proved its validity in certain cases (19th and 20th century America) but failed in others (modern Eastern Europe). Now, a new wave of migration requires a change of perception and a transition from traditional, nationalist preferences to a transcultural approach. The current study aims to tackle this trend from a socio-cultural point of view.

Keywords: nationalism; multiculturalism; transculturalism; adaptation

1. Introduction

For more than half a century, globalization has opened the gates to economic cooperation and cultural exchanges between individuals and communities all around the world. This has proved to be a difficult task: if trade or financial exchanges have their own rules and regulations, culture is, to a large extent, the result of mind frames and local traditions, therefore it is very difficult to find the common grounds which could result in universally accepted norms and structures.

In recent times, everybody's interest has focused on the English language and on the way in which the cultural elements of English-speaking countries have managed to become the melting pot of various influences, while having a bearing on the development of other earlier or modern cultures. It is arguably the reason why the literature on the topic is so generous for any researcher. Irrespective of English continuing to act as a lingua franca today, more authors advocate a clear conceptual separation between its centuries-long unifying role and the present-day need for the preservation of individual cultural traits. Cultural diversity is viewed as objective and positive (Appiah, 2005) but should involve "public recognition",

[1] Carmen Ardelean, The Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, karenar65@gmail.com

as well as the free expression of group identity, language and traditions (Ivison, 2011). In any case, the present study aims to offer a modest contribution to this conglomerate of opinions and conclusions and remains open to debate and criticism.

In historic terms, especially since the Middle Ages, the European nations have defined themselves as pioneering explorers of new territories and promoters of the European culture, up to the remotest corners of the world. As we now know, the clash of cultures did not always have a happy ending but, at the same time, it resulted in a boom of unparalleled knowledge which, often at the expense of smaller cultures, has taught mankind a critical lesson about communication and the day-by-day coexistence with "the different other".

More than any other geographical space, Europe sets an example for its sequence of cultural successes and failures; it exported its way of life on all continents and was a driver of evolution. However, the most difficult lesson to learn for Europeans has been that of tolerance. The term itself is open to criticism, since it has a somewhat negative, even paternalistic component attached. Modern life in Europe shows that solid legislative provisions are far from being doubled by real-life harmonious relationships between majority cultures and the culture of minorities living within national states. The same is valid in the case of gender minorities that, in many European countries, are far from being granted the equal rights and equal chances as listed in national laws.

Built on a foundation of nationalism with a deep respect for political and socio-cultural hierarchies, often imposed by force, since the signing of the Westphalian Treatises of 1648, the European nation-states have done their best to preserve the same *status quo* which protected them from most overseas influences. The effects of these treatises can still be seen in the way in which many European Union member states protect their borders, in the religious-biased division of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant areas, in the focus on long-forgotten traditions now brought again to life, in the centralizing, self-protective approach we are now witnessing, mostly at state level, along with a brutal rejection of any potential atomization of existing states. (Ardelean, 2017)

The Westphalian principles – the coexistence of sovereign states, the maintenance of an internal balance of power and especially the interdiction of any interference in the domestic affairs – are still valid today and, to a certain extent, provide an explanation for the crises which have marred the history of our continent over the last hundred years: the two World Wars of the 20th century, failure to deter Eastern-European fall to communism and, more recently, the nationalism-based risk of fragmentation and atomization.

At a closer look, however, throughout its history, Europe has grown and evolved due to its constant clash with other cultures and it gradually became a multicultural society *within* its open borders, though never too tolerant with influences from *beyond* these, with the help of politically-controlled immigration legislation.

Multiculturalism is more than a complex concept, it is also a state of the mind. In countries such as the United States of America, Australia or Canada it has already proved its short- and middle-term legitimacy, but its long-term normative validity is yet to be confirmed. For several decades now, it has remained at the centre of debates and conflicts alike.
But multiculturalism is not the only key-word by which sociologists, psychologists, economists or politicians are trying to define the world of today.

2. Reference terms – food for thought – or action?

If *nationalism* is a concept that focuses on the unity of all the people living in a given geographical areas with set borders, *multiculturalism* takes into account the individual ethnic identity at group level. For a long time, they have been perceived as absolute opposites: you cannot be a nationalism-biased state and tolerate multiculturalism. Reversely, it seems impossible to accept multiculturalism and promote nationalist policies at the same time. But the truth is that, in practice, apart from few and far between attempts to ethnic cleansing, which left behind deep marks of suffering and discontent, especially during the 20th century, multiculturalism in alive and well all around the world, even in countries where nationalist feelings are on the rise. According to Barry:

The spectre that [...] haunts Europe is one of strident nationalism, ethnic self-assertion and the exaltation of what divides people at the expense of what unites them. [....] The same trends in less extreme forms are also apparent in the affluent countries of Western Europe and North America, and in the southern hemisphere in Australia and New Zealand. (Barry, 2002: 3)

But, even if multiculturalism is the reality of today's society, it does not also imply full or even partial *integration*. Actually, the fact that one can find a "Chinatown" in all major cities in the world, just as often as Greek, Armenian, Jewish or Arab quarters shows that ethnic communities do share the same surroundings but rarely mingle or even share their cultural traditions with other ethnical groups. As such, it may be that multiculturalism is used as a weapon of the *divide et impera* type, meant to maintain the existing social hierarchies.

Although multiculturalism is based on the acknowledgement of various types of differences, so far it has failed to reveal long-term solutions for imposing similarities which, at state level, are many, but much fewer if ethnic groups are at stake. Harari (2011: 150-155) points out that, among other global features, we all

share certain accepted legal and geopolitical rules or the compatible economic systems while differences are much deeper in what our perspective on hierarchies, social classes, race, gender or religion is concerned. Barry also concedes that "the fact of difference is universal and so is its social recognition (Barry, 2002: 12), while, in her introductory note, Gutmann states that there is a largely underplayed clash between individual ideals and the actual public recognition of cultural groups' diversity:

[The] ideal of individuals flourishing in a mobile, multicultural society (or world) does indeed underestimate the need of people as members of discrete ethnic, linguistic, and other cultural groups for public recognition and preservation of their particular cultural identities. (in Taylor, 1994: 9)

Up until the turn of the third millennium, multiculturalism (still ignoring the need for real integration) remained the only term which was thought to be one of the critical characteristics that Western liberal democracies could take pride in, whenever they compared themselves with the autocratic regimes in different parts of the world. However, criticism from theorists was not to be ignored:

Critical analyses generally establish an isomorphic relation between the multicultural as a signifier and multiculturalism as the signified. In this way, having been conceived as the accommodation of majority-white-indigenous and minority-'non-white'-immigrant cultures, the concept of multiculturalism is treated as an essentialist category, where its meaning is invariant and trans-contextual. (Hesse, 2000: 10)

It is somewhat surprising that, at a time when political correctness was meant to smooth away the conflicting views on race, gender or religion, such hidden facets of multiculturalism would spring to the surface unpunished. But they were there to stay, and sociologists and linguists took upon themselves the task of defining better concepts – and the related terminology – that would adequately express the real relationship between individualized cultural groups, as a response to the unifying global tendencies that expanded beyond their initial economic purpose and risked turning ethnic and cultural identity into history.

International organisations also became involved in this new trend; in 2001 UNESCO issued the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, whose text (in French and English) starts with the following words: "*La richesse culturelle du monde, c'est sa diversité en dialogue*" ("The cultural wealth of the world is its diversity in dialogue."). Four years later, in 2005, the same organisation proposed for debate and then adopted the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which sanctioned the emergence of a new concept – *Interculturalism*, viewed as more appropriate for a real dialogue between cultures. Some of its fundamental objectives are "to encourage dialogue among

cultures with a view to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchanges in the world in favour of *intercultural respect* and a culture of peace" as well as "to foster interculturality in order to develop cultural interaction in the spirit of building bridges among peoples".

Interculturalism was not a new term; Nussbaum (in Taylor, 1997: 40) had defined it as "the recognition of common human needs across cultures and of dissonance and critical dialogue within cultures", while Delanty (2009: 71) views it as an extensive image of modern cultures living in harmony, multiculturalism being just one of its components. But it was for the first time that an international organisation emphasized its role as a real mediator between different cultures, a real hope for a future devoid of culturally-biased conflicts.

3. Focus on language, if not on culture

Since language is the most significant expression of a culture, it was a foregone conclusion that the presence of different languages spoken by different ethnic groups, within any acknowledged multicultural society, could act as a confirmation of a valid coexistence of races within the same area. Gradually, *multilingualism* came to be considered a reasonable substitute for multiculturalism.

Before anything else, multilingualism is a proof of tolerance: at least in theory, if the acceptance of the ruling majority groups also provides a chance for minority groups to speak their own native language freely, this could act as a first step in closing the cultural gap between them. But, in most countries, traditional legislation includes a reference to the so-called "official language" that majority groups consider as a fundamental requirement for any citizen. Different countries have different perspectives towards this issue: for instance, in the southern American states closest to Mexico Spanish is spoken more often than English and no administration has yet taken into account imposing the official English language upon them. Conversely, several European states still refuse to grant their minority groups the right to speak *only* their native language. Specific legislation exists but, in practice, linguistic differences often hinder the chance of a peaceful co-existence between communities with different cultural backgrounds.

Still, any coin has two sides and this issue can also be viewed from a different angle. In the last few decades, individual immigration has been gradually replaced by massive group immigration. At individual level it is much easier to learn the new language and even to adopt the norms and traditions of a culture of choice. That is how the American "melting pot" of cultures has developed in the last 100 years, based on the selective migration of individuals. Even if each one of these individuals joined already existing communities formed by members of his or her former culture, they were met by already *integrated* communities which equally observed the characteristics of their culture, and that of their new home. Large

groups of immigrants, however, tend to preserve all the characteristics of their own culture, including their language, as a guarantee for its survival. In this case, the blend of cultures is impossible in practice.

Attempts to unify cultures were often doubled by similar efforts to define a common ground for modern languages, arguably for political reasons. One of the sociolinguistic theories that arguably became trendy in the 1960s proposed a view of "resembling" languages from a *pluricentric*, or polycentric point of view, in countries such as Canada – where the French spoken in Quebec was viewed as a result of the pluricentric quality of the language spoken in France – or in former Yugoslavia, where the assumption that the languages spoken in the component states (Serbian, Serbo-Croat, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin) are "branches" of a unique, centric language became the source of nationalist unrest in the respective countries.

It is safe to say that communities view their common language as a fundamental trait of their culture, along with their history and religion, among others. The resurgence of nationalist views regarding language is probably linked to the emergence of English as a *lingua franca*, during a process similar to what had previously happened in all the historic periods in the evolution of mankind. When English became the language that everyone knows or must learn, Greek, Latin, French, German or Russian had already taken turns in playing that part on the background of military domination or colonization.

However, unlike other languages before it, English has proved that it can live along with other indigenous languages by only influencing instead of replacing them. Arguably, it is the main reason why it spread so easily and dominantly around the world. New fields in finance, economics, IT or social sciences chose to use English for new terminologies, while the spoken language in almost every country is borrowing English words for which, more often than not, there already is a local equivalent. What, at first, seemed to be a passing fashion has turned into a common trend, albeit the usage of Anglicisms is rejected in academic circles, for each and every one of us.

If we look back into history, it seems surprising that a concept which, at first, seemed all-inclusive and self-serving, such as culture, has gradually grown in complexity and developed into subcategories of even greater complexity; however, there is still a long way to go until we manage to transfer the laws and harmony of linguistics into practice. The problem with words – especially in English – is that they are easily coined, but it proves difficult to attach more than definitions to them. Sociolinguists will probably continue to debate whether the intricate concepts should or can be replicated by *cultural integration* in real life, unifying events, while culturally-driven communities will continue to protect their identity.

Finally – at least for this moment in the approach to culture – here is another term which deserves being mentioned, at least in passing. *Interculturalism*, unlike any other term in this large family, is mainly used by non-native English speakers in order to point out the process of mutual interaction between cultures, very much similar to a "negotiation" of cultural choices. Its use is geographically limited to areas from Central and Eastern Europe or East Asia. (I would exclude Australia from this enumeration, as all Anglo-Saxon countries are by default multicultural societies, with minorities living in well-delimited districts, having collective rights, etc). In broad terms, interculturalism emphasises the need to increase people's awareness of cultural differences and respect for minority cultures; it could even become tomorrow's cultural "buzz word" if only mankind finally accepts the right of "the other" to be perceived not as different, but rather as a compatible cultural alternative.

4. Transcultural awareness – old and new; far from a simple linguistic debate

The so-called *transcultural approach* has gained in importance in recent years, partially due to the European Commission's efforts to unify and standardize member states' attitude towards languages and cultures within the European Union.

The roots of the transcultural approach can be traced back to the works of Fernando Ortiz Fernández, a Cuban anthropologist who first spoke of transculturalism in the 1940s, thereby defining the process by which cultures tend to converge and even merge, under certain historical conditions (Ortiz, 1940: 97). More than a simple cultural change under the influence of a stronger (read *dominating*) culture, he viewed it as a complex process which results in a deep alteration of any local culture. He perceived *transculturation* as a social phenomenon, noticeable especially in ethnic communities that were submitted to the influence of a powerful culture – in his case, at the time, the growing American influence in his native country:

I have chosen the word transculturation to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here, and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk, either in the economic or in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects of its life. (Ortiz, 1940, transl. 1995: 98)

Not surprisingly, his book was translated into English only fifty years later, but it had already aroused interest in the communist circles from Europe at the time of its publication. For Ortiz, transculturalism was a synthesis a cultural group's departure from its past and its preference for new, present outside influences, the result of which is a new "common" culture which no longer is defining for the said cultural community.

At the beginning of the new millennium, with the arrival in Europe of larger groups of immigrants, especially from Africa and the Middle East, from countries torn by war and famine, the need for transcultural awareness grew in importance again, this time in a more thorough attempt to accommodate higher numbers of people representing different cultures. This trend continues today, when cultural pluralism is no longer a theoretical idea, and the leaders of European countries need to take measures for a real integration of the newcomers.

Due to massive migration, the mix of cultures has a new significance, and this new type of interaction requires "seeing oneself in the other" from a more egalitarian perspective. As a rule, politicians are rather slow in taking the required steps in this direction, to a large extent, this task is better achieved by civic and humanitarian groups and organisations.

Tassinari describes transculturalism as a "new form of humanism" (Tassinari, 1999: 46) which rejects cultural boundaries; in his opinion, the traditional understanding of separate, pure cultures should be left aside and replaced by the acceptance of cultural alterity. In turn, Cuccioletta (2002) imagines a "cosmopolitan citizenship":

The recognition that modern societies are no longer monolithic, that the imaginary social space has mushroomed into a multitude of identities has propelled us into a realization that we are in an era where interculturality, transculturalism and the eventual prospect of identifying a cosmopolitan citizenship can become a reality. (Cuccioletta, 2002: 2)

However, for the citizens of European countries, accepting large groups of mixed cultural nature in their proximity is also difficult, taking into account the universal tendency towards traditionalism, for fear of losing their own cultural identity. Today we are witnessing a new surge of nationalist displays which need to be solved with the help of a *transcultural dialogue* based on partnership, not on hierarchical viewpoints. Integration is ever more difficult, as it would mean a total acceptance of what Cuccioletta calls "the founding culture" while giving up most features of the "integrated" cultural group. He concludes that:

Transculturalism, places the concept of culture at the center of a redefinition of the nation-state or even the disappearance of the nation-state. This process of recognizing oneself in the other leads inevitably to a cosmopolitan citizenship. This citizenship, independent of political structures and institutions, develops each individual in the understanding that one's culture is multiple, métis and that each human experience and existence is due to the contact with other, who in reality is like, oneself. (Cuccioletta, 2002: 9)

It is arguably too early to assess the effects of mass migration to Europe, from the point of view of the cultural changes it may produce. Even so, what is needed, more than anything else, is a change of mentality from both sides involved in this new, historic clash.

At any stage in the history of mankind, development was based on sharing experience, communication and a conscious adaptation of new cultural elements. But the complexity of human life today, as well as the memory of deep predicaments which marred the last two centuries could lead to deeper social and cultural crises. In a world shaped according to defining differences, could we, eventually, choose to act moving closer together?

5. Conclusions

The main aim of this study was to open the gate towards a topic which has constantly acted both as a source of conflicts and as a driving force for development: culture. We may view it as an all-inclusive concept that reflects the traditions, achievements and habits at ethnic, social or national level, but it can also be defined according to historic group encounters and choices.

The road from nationalism to accepted multiculturalism has been long and hard, yet the latter does not seem to satisfy the need for social and cultural harmony at global level today. Different geographical and cultural areas require an alternative perspective to it, as a guarantee for identity preservation.
Sociologists, anthropologists and linguists are constantly trying, with the tools of their trade, to make cultural traits converge, at least in theory; replicating theory in practice, however, is difficult.

Today's world displays an image in which diplomacy, conflicts, distrust and agreement succeed one another cyclically. Illegal migration has rendered historic country boundaries useless and cross-boundary humanitarian crises are becoming a huge challenge for individual state administrations.

Judging by this background image, transculturalism seems to bring the necessary answers to a number of cultural questions. The idea of breaking down the imaginary or real cultural boundaries among communities is attractive to masses, but debatable to political leaders.

Cultural diversity is now under focus as never before; in spite of the existing predisposition to religious, racial, social or gender prejudice people are slowly but surely starting to acknowledge the fact that differences can be bridged upon by tolerance. The contribution of international organizations – UNESCO, the European Union – can be an example for others to follow. Four centuries ago, the

nation-state imposed a unifying, levelling cultural approach which is often challenged by contemporary life.

Whether or not this challenge shall lead to a new crisis, or act as the foundation for transcultural awareness and interaction remains to be seen. In any case, we can join the "cognitive revolution" that starts with "the willingness to admit ignorance" (Harari, 2011: 179), and then embrace a new cultural mentality, in full interaction with other, totally opposed cultures.

Ancient philosophers stated that life resembles a flow in continuous change; reality as we know it is also a project in continuous progress. Cultures are conceived and developed by humans for humans; they are elusive from a conceptual point of view and palpable through human achievements. Is it possible for transcultural agreement to be achieved as well in the near future?

References and bibliography

Appiah, A. K. 2005. *The ethics of identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Also: *Identity and Cosmopolitanism with Kwame Anthony Appiah - Conversations with History.* YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQqNRfgIVro

Barry, B. 2002. *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cuccioletta, D. 2002. "Multiculturalism or Transculturalism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship", in *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17: 6-7. Retrieved from http://www.canadian-studies.net/lccs/LJCS/Vol_17/Cuccioletta.pdf. Accessed on 2 September 2018.

Delanty, G. 2009. *Community*, Second edition, Routledge: 71.

Fernandez, Ortiz F. 1940. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. Translated into English 1995, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Gutmann, A. 1994. "Introduction" in Taylor, Ch., *Multiculturalism*, Expanded Paperback Edition: Princeton University Press.

Harari, Yuval N. 2011. *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*. Penguin, Random House: UK.

Hesse, B. (ed.). 2000. "Introduction", in *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, "Transruptions"*: Zed Books.

Ivison, Duncan. 2011. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism*: Ashgate

Nussbaum, Martha C. 1997. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Cambridge, MA: CUP. Referred to in

Taylor, Ch. 1994. *Multiculturalism*. Expanded Paperback Edition: Princeton University Press.

Tassinari, L. 1999. *Utopies par le Hublot*, Carte Blanche: Outremont.

Taylor, Ch. 1994. *Multiculturalism*, Expanded Paperback Edition: Princeton University Press.

*** *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. UNESCO 2002 Printed in France. Retrieved from CLT-2002/WS/9. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf. Accessed on 2 September 2018.

*** *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*: Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID= 31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html. Accessed on 2 September 2018.

Ardelean, C. 2017. *Criza catalano-spaniolă şi reflectarea ei populară*. Retrieved from DW online: https://www.dw.com/ro/criza-catalano-spaniol%C4%83-%C8%99i-reflectarea-ei-popular%C4%83/a-41185308?fbclid=IwAR1vNfJ_xogSg-RSLEY0zSLOJwZL-2az3gHd_oiO3842cVx5ET9NG_lFdn4. Accessed on 2 September 2018.

The author

Carmen Ardelean is an Associate Professor of English and Communication, Ph.D. at the Department of Foreign Languages & Communication – Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages, UTCB – Bucharest, Romania. She is the Director of the *Research Centre for Specialized Translation and Intercultural Communication* from the same university. Author of 8 books on Translation Studies and Culture Studies, as well as of more than 60 articles on the same topics. She also holds a Master's Degree in Political Studies.