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**INTERCULTURALITY: AN ATTEMPT OF RECONSTRUCTION IN A
WORLD OF DECONSTRUCTION**

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***Abstract:** We live in a complex, ultra-dynamic and uncertain world for the human being, a world subjected permanently to an avalanche of challenges and demand that are often unpredictable. The understanding of the contemporary society and of its evolving course calls for an approach to the topic of culture. Together with the economic issues, the cultural subjects have gained increased importance in accomplishing and understanding social development and geopolitical transformations. More and more realities and phenomena of the contemporary world are being explained through culture, which has become one of the decisive non-economic factors of advance. The idea of a new paradigm of culture is being launched, as a result of a reconfiguration of its internal structure, through the expansion of knowledge and communication, of consumer culture, of post-modern forms of art etc. At the same time, we witness an alteration of social mentalities, cultural conducts, taste, of the contemporary man’s whole lifestyle. If modern cultural globalization has initiated the expansion of western values and lifestyles (occidentalization of the world), then, the development of informational society and the amplification of communications have caused a multi-directional development, a non-unilateral globalization, very hard to understand and manage. Interculturality, as a theoretical and actional principle, is intended as the path toward understanding and solving the contemporary world’s challenges.*

***Keywords:** culture, interculturality, globalization, deconstruction*

1. INTRODUCTION

The antidote to this profound crisis that has covered the world should be, among others that function independently, the theoretical and action principle of *interculturality*. In order to underline the surpassing of previous stages, pluri- and multiculturalism, interculturality, through its prefix *inter* highlights *interaction, exchange, reciprocity, openness, solidarity*. Culture becomes a potential instrument for remaking the mankind’s unity, for installing harmony among people. The respect of the cultural pluralism, of diversity, is converted into interculturalism.

2. INTERCULTURALITY – AN ATTEMPT FOR RECOVERING MANKIND’S HARMONY

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The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, analyzing the spiritual configuration of Europe (*Kulturgebilde*), finds out the unity of spiritual life, “the self-unifying character” of cultural products: “Beyond the conflicts among European nations, they preserve in their spirit a specific internal connection that overcomes national differences” (Husserl, 1997:27). There is a European spiritual *telos*, beyond the European crisis of human existence.

The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel criticizes modernity as a world in which not only object but also human values are reduced to the status of merchandise. It is a world in which money dominates the social life, quantity prevails

over quality and semblance ignores essence. Although his vision has pessimistic and tragic accents, it contains the manifestation of trust in the repairing, unifying effect of culture: “Culture is the path from the close unity concealed through a large manifestation of plurality, toward the unveiled unity” (Simmel, 1998:211).

The Antillean poet Derek Walcott, laureate of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992, born at the confluence of cultures, witnesses the tumults of his contemporary world, “found in a painful process of better understanding itself, torn apart by vanities and sharp contradictions” (Walcott, 1993:61). The poet’s sensitivity perceives the world as a Babylon of languages and images, races, ethnic groups and cultures, “in a land that seems not to be able to accommodate us, suddenly becoming too small”, which causes the contemporary cultural and moral crisis (Simmel, 1998:63).

The recovery of mankind’s harmony implies its redefining under the conditions of the contemporary life. Etymologically, the term comes from the Latin “humanus”, derivate of “homo”, man. Regularly, it designates the human gender, but also benevolence toward kinfolk. The concept of humanity resulted by opposition to animality (Clement *et al.*, 2000:534). Due to his capacity of learning, his consciousness and language, the man creates a new ontological level, in his hypostasis of creative being that founded the path toward culture and history. In this respect, humanity transcends particular individuals, reflecting the continuity of the manifestations of typical human traits, on the time axis. Scholars consider the man as being the expression of the universal: each human being comprises the essence of humanity (humanitas), is the bearer of humanitas, which makes possible his connection with the universal, namely, with what exists for ever and everywhere (*semper et ubique*). This aspect is to be found in the specificity of the cultural process, in its internal chemistry, rendered by the objectivization of subject and the subjectivization of object. Thus, culture performs the leap, the unity between personal and superpersonal, because it is that “type of individual perfection that can occur only through assimilation or the use of superpersonal creation” (Simmel, 1998:218).

Olivier Reboul defines humanity by means of three values: *communication*, *equality* and *solidarity*, values that converge toward the accomplishment of communion of all spirits, transgressing their diversity (Reboul, 1992:25). Out of these constituting dimensions of humanity, the universal right of each individual to be recognized as human comes forward, an idea that brings back to actuality the Kantian categorical imperative: “Act so that you treat humanity,

whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” (Kant, 1999:238). The man cannot be treated as a simple object (reification of man takes place in modernity), because due to his very humanity, he possesses absolute value, a sacred character. The moral obligation that derives from this status is directed toward him and also toward others.

The thinker Herman von Keyserling, a fine observer of the European intellectual effervescence but equally the turmoil that lacerated Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, warned:

The idea of humanity lost its entire force and prestige. Therefore, if a profound change does not occur in our souls, we will have to expect decades or even centuries of massacres...” (Keyserling, 1996:7).

In his opinion, the excessive intellectualization of modern man, the overestimation of homo sapiens ignore the sentimental value of the notion of humanity:

the inhumane being or dehumanized is not the imbecile, but the individual lacking superior feelings: and the latter are the ones that offer the connector which lay the foundation of communities (Keyserling, 1996:50).

Pleading for the spiritual revival of man and the suppression of the existent discrepancy between external (material) progress and the internal one, his thoughts are directed toward the future, to the possibility of the human being to reach harmony and plenitude, to a new humanism.

Rene-Jean Dupuy, on basis of analyzing the idea of community, distinguishes five meanings of humanity, highlighting its relativity: *captured humanity*, *tolerated humanity*, *unified humanity*, *scattered humanity* and *open humanity* (Cucuş, 1995:85). Captured humanity belongs to a socio-cultural group pretending to be the embodiment of the perfect value of humanity. The majority group, the “chosen” one, that tolerates the others, embodies the tolerated humanity. The pretension of expansion from the western culture is attributed with the expression of the unified humanity, through the assimilation of all the others within an imposed unity. The result of exacerbation of racial, ethnical, confessional etc. differences led to the appearance of scattered humanity. The open humanity corresponds to an ideal, that of the unity in diversity, which supports the affirmation of both similitude and difference, within a harmonious plurality.

Nowadays, all these forms of humanity coexist, in various proportions, and with various highlights, based on the actual socio-historical characteristics

of the place. In this context, interculturality becomes the promoting instrument for the open humanity, through the achievement of a balance between equality and diversity, the free manifestation of differences and the avoidance of spiritual dissolution. The dynamics identity-alterity or closeness-openness is defining for the world today and for cultures' fate. A culture proves its value not only through itself, but also through the "manner in which it allows openness toward reverberations from outside" (Cucos, 2002:132).

Universal communication, the free flux of words and images that spread around the world represents accelerating factors of cultural globalization. In this context, the cultivation of identity and the requirements of globalization need to be situated in a complementarity rapport. Own identity becomes the premises for openness, access to universality and equally, the conscientization of own cultural identity, it implies knowledge of other cultures, similar to the manner in which the path to oneself passes through the Others:

any culture periodically needs confrontation with a different one. And this confrontation involves knowledge, prior intimacy with it, in other words, influence (Gasset, 1997:25).

This oscillation could lead to reinvention of "community" to the detriment of the contemporary "society".

The German philosopher Max Scheler (1874-1928), follower and exponent of the phenomenological movement, analyzes the distinction *society-community*. As a "general cultural attitude that proposes an ample and optimistic openness in confrontations with reality", phenomenology offers the right register for reading and understanding the contemporary world (*Enciclopedia de filosofie și științe umane*, 2004:966). This philosophy gravitates around values and their role, in different forms of human organization. This aspect makes the difference between "society" and "community". Community presupposes a net of interactions among individuals, and, on the other side, values shared as community values. These are values that circulate through communication, are based on recognition and interiorization. When this nets tears apart, "society" appears, as a unity based on "remains", "waste" resulted from internal processes of the scattered community: "When the unity of community life is no longer capable of cultivating individuals as vivid organs of its body, society appears like unity based only on a contract" (...), "an arbitrary, artificial inter-human bond..." (Scheler, 1998:163). The distinction belongs to the

German sociologist and philosopher (1855-1936), and it appears in his work "Community and Society" (1887). If for the pre-industrial society community is specific, in industrial and post-industrial societies it becomes impossible to achieve because both individuals and social classes and categories take action to satisfy their own needs and interests, in a selfish manner, by means of laws and contracts. Natural, spontaneous and powerfully charged emotionally relationships are replaced by formal relations, of contractual type. Individuals composing the society live "next to each other" without being "together", strangers to one another. This estrangement manifests not only in relations with the others, but also toward themselves. "Global society" does nothing else but to multiply, at planetary level, through a space-temporal expansion, this matrix of social relationships specific to "societies".

Overcoming the pessimism of Tönnies' approach, there are many voices that invoke culture and interculturality as being possible key factors for the "healing of countless wounds caused by the hatred and intolerance that dominated most of the twentieth century" (Delors, 2000:178). Prevention against the peril of dehumanization and the reconstruction of "homo humanus" involve the accomplishment of an internal evolution of an individual endowed with freedom and responsibility. Learning how to live not next to the other, but together with others, equals learning how to live harmoniously within oneself. Inner and external harmony of the relationship with the world is reciprocally demanded. The term *harmony*, due to its semantic universe, expresses the telos of this endeavor. Often used to express the quality of interhuman relationships, or of the socio-affective climate, the concept derives from the Greek „harmonia”, signifying "equilibrium, balance of contrasts" (Peters, 1993:113). The theory of harmony was developed by the Greek Pythagorean School: the reduction of music intervals to mathematical rapports and the proposal of number as the constitutive principle of all things (arithmos), led to a cosmological theory based on the musical harmony of the world. At the same time, the term was used to explain the mixtures (holon), or to convey the psyche, as harmony among contrasts. From the esthetical perspective, harmony stands for

absolute agreement among the elements of a whole (...). According to tradition, the parts or functions of a whole need to be organically structured, yet equally distinct, in order to produce a unitary general and balanced effect (Lăzărescu, 1995:38).

In other words, harmony is the one that assures “unity in variety” or “unity in multiplicity”.

This meaning of harmony leads us to the European Council’s calls “All equal – All different” (Cozma, 2001:22) or “Unity in diversity”. Furthermore, appealing to esthetics, we can invoke the chromatic harmony and its similarities with the European multi- and interculturalism. Traditionally, there are two types of chromatic agreements: by analogy, within which the chromatic dominant (the main color) is the one that creates the general hue and imposes its character, the other hues being subordinated to it (notice the assimilation process of the minor culture by the host culture); the second type of chromatic agreement is by contrast (polychromy) that is based on some dissimilar or complementary colors’ contrasts. In the contemporary art, these modalities are abandoned, to leave room for some unlimited series of intermediary, new harmonies, whose character, although it may be consonant, assonant, dissonant, there is an internal coordinating logic in each of them, a coherent system of relations. By analogy, we can assert that the European cultural polychromy corresponds to that type of harmony that abandons the idea of psychic comfort and introduces the dissonances, shock, variation of distributions and rhythms, of surprise elements.

This is the European cultural framework, whose polychromy and harmony should be supported by the common element of humanity. A significant contribution, in this respect, comes on behalf of ethology, which highlights the fact that intimate feelings and human conducts possess as resources systems of impulses coming from phylogenetic or cultural foundations, and they are part of a well ordered and harmonically functional system. Therefore, the preservation of what has already been tested (traditions, habits, values etc.) represents an essential condition for the evolution of culture, just like a genome is for species’ transformation (Lorenz, 2006:73). In the Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz’ view, culture, through the system of promoted social behavior models that represents the very skeleton of a culture, forms the connection of a cultural group and any arbitrary removal of an element may have unpredictable effects on the quality of interhuman relationships and, implicitly, on the health of the social community. Under the circumstances of the contemporary world, removal of traditions and the explosion of the new, ultra-dynamism, incertitude and unpredictable leave its imprint on the relationships between people, with effects on their humanity. Lorenz identifies a series of factors that pose the threat of culture destruction: the powerful underestimation of irrational

knowledge thesaurus (or the overestimation of science); overestimation of the thesaurus produced by homo faber, which becomes the source of the malicious arrogance of reasoning, to which national hatred adds. Another disturbing phenomenon is the hatred between generations, the equivalent of hatred between different ethnic groups (Lorenz, 2006:77-78). The generation gap, between parents and children is the source of weakening and gradual altering of the entire net of social relations, of the capacity of having human contacts. These realities confirm the theories released by the social psychology that strengthen the socio-cultural substance of the human personality, in its hypostasis of socio-cultural construct, of emergence of constant interactions between an individual and its life environment. Although it is the product of its individual experiences, of its existential progress, it will contain typical models of behavior, generally recognized and accepted by the members of society and fundamental for the values they share. Thus, a type of “cultural behavior” is shaped, and it is defined through the totality of actions, reactions, attitudes, beliefs which an individual manifests in a preset social situation. The process becomes more intricate at the psychological level, under the conditions of the current intercultural texture, through the acculturation phenomenon. The concept launched by the American anthropologist G.W. Powel, at the end of the nineteenth century, designates the profound transformations produced in the reasoning and acting manner of migrants, on their encounter with the American society of insertion. The acculturation process produces durable modifications over individual and collective personalities, reconfigurations of values and attitudes, sometimes discrepancies, which affect the inner equilibrium of people, who lose their unity and the harmony of their inner universe. Their regaining is difficult, at considerable costs, although sometimes this reality is minimized. Social and cultural heredity come in place, yet, psychological studies show that, through their mechanisms, “the value, attitudinal and behavioral model of a community changes only after three generations from the alteration of that community’s composition” (Gavreliuc, 2011:55). Intercultural experiences represent real challenges for the individual identity profile. Even though there is an axiological nucleus, relatively stable, of each individual, its cultural identity is permanently subjected to alterations and reconstructions, and it permanently redefines itself. Out of the axiological universe that dominated the world today, the value that is worth restoring is the human being and its humanity, value that was gradually absorbed by the material values of the last two centuries.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the economic interests or political statements, the real challenge of interculturality consists of identifying the shared value of humanity, fact that implies a repositioning of values. The top position of the pyramid should be occupied by MAN and his humanity, whereas the reconstruction of communities becomes the indispensable condition of this aspiration. This is the great mission of education in the twenty-first century: the development of humanity in every human being - a very difficult endeavor that implies (re)learning how to live together.

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