

INTERCULTURALITY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Abstract: *Touraine (2012) observes that development is no longer a stage that follows tradition: in the globalized society space and time, private and public life are compressed. With networked communication systems, billions of individuals do the same things, wear the same clothes, watch the same films, drink the same cola and use the same language. International concerns revolve around the same problems: environmental pollution, the greenhouse effect and the pandemic (financial flows and technologies). Nevertheless, the things we share that allow us to affirm we belong to the same culture are not these. Each society and social group has a culture of its own and “globalization” certainly means world distribution, but there is a separation between the circulation of goods and services and the bond with a particular culture or society. The term “multiculturalism” implies multiethnicity and these two words often coexist within one country or big city. Communication between different cultures may take place at the level of interpersonal communication, but also at the level of formal written messages, on the Internet or in the press.*

Keywords: *interculturality; globalization; pluralism; intermediarity, multiethnicity*

1. FOREWORD

Intercultural communication cannot be taught; however, a competence model can be learnt by observation, day by day and experience by experience, until the person becomes skilled in this kind of communication. What can be taught is that each culture has its own dignity, equal to that of every other culture. It is important to bear in mind the lifelong learning process according to which one learns through contact with others, whether it be singular individuals or groups of people of another culture. Intercultural communication is constantly evolving because it belongs to the “life” of every nation and every social group, so much so that calling it “intercultural” does not make sense: “cultural” would suffice to define it (Balboni, Caon, 2015; Balboni, 2006). All possible critical areas and sources of friction must be taken into account in communication between people of different culture; this is an operation that we perform within our specific culture too. We are not always aware of the existence of cultural values because those values often appear natural to us, so that we assume everybody shares them. The main tools for intercultural communication are verbal and non-verbal language. Events are governed by universal rules, but also by cultural rules that are limited to a specific culture; their limitation is precisely why they cause friction in case of differentiation.

Intercultural logic must not be compared with the idea of the “melting pot”. The great migrations from Europe to the US between the end of the 19th and the

beginning of the 20th century were met with the theory of a crucible, melting and sieving all cultural differences – thus giving rise to a new reality; this led to a process of homogenization of the peoples meeting in a territory in which they wished to belong, because they were in search of a new homeland. The key for understanding this kind of integration is not multiculturalism, which refers to a transitional situation due to contingent needs and limited in time, but rather a life choice. Unlike the melting pot, interculturality¹ is generally a constant attitude that acknowledges the richness existing in variety, but that does not aim to homologation, as its goal is merely allowing smooth interaction between different cultures².

Every state is individual as such, but that does not imply that internally there is homogeneity. What primarily defines a state as a unit is language; but one language is not shared by all people in every state. Interculturality becomes alive when someone comes in contact with others belonging to different cultures. There are factors that bring about the awareness of defending one’s own identity, which in turn corresponds to one’s own difference. This is why it becomes necessary to understand and accept diversity as a common element.

¹ Assimilation is not a concern in interculturality; the understanding of a culture that is different from ours, to which one does not necessarily wish to belong, but that needs to be understood is though.

² UNESCO promoted intercultural communication through 800 organizations and 3000 programmes (Bennett, 2015).

Nowadays universalism and particularism are no longer opposite terms. We have come to affirm the universality of our condition as human beings endowed with equal rights. The rights of every person are universal, given that they are independent of wealth, political power, religious authority, family condition (Touraine, 2012: 66). We have not attained equality, but although we live in separate worlds we are “equal” according to the law.

2. CONSEQUENCES OF TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

Both the consequences of the technological revolution and the phenomena of individualization marking the postmodern period invite speaking of a complex, fragmented society, bearer of malaise. The current society offers an individual great freedom, but also great loneliness (Elias, 1990). “Wellbeing” is found in the constant search to which postmodern man is doomed. The promotion of individual wellbeing is among the primary commitments of postmodernity, because only by pursuing wellbeing can we go toward peace and the hope of a more human life for all the peoples on the planet. The narcissism, fragility and fragmentation to which man is subject today are negative perspectives. One outsider voice is that of Sen (1986), who defines development as a process of expanding the real freedoms enjoyed by people. Human freedoms are the core of Sen’s thinking: if it is true that the increase in individual income leads to expanding the freedom of individuals, it is just as true that such freedom also depends on other factors, such as social and economic systems, political and civil rights. What matters is to become aware that in order to attain wellbeing for all, a transcultural, interdisciplinary and content-related perspective needs to be embraced, capable of highlighting the role of all the factors involved in promoting wellbeing understood as an overall harmonious condition regarding the whole person in their mental, bodily and environmental dimensions (Tessarolo, Laloli, 2009).

It should be considered that every historical period has to thematize the linguistic self-interpretations and affirmations by which it is ridden. Koselleck observes that on the whole the language of the sources of each historical period may be considered a great metaphor of the period under consideration (Scuccimarra, 2009: VII). Comprehension is understood as a conceptual processing of the multiple happenings, to the extent that a concept gathers the multiplicity of a historical experience, as well as an amount of theoretical and

practical relations in a context that, as such, is given, and may only be experienced by means of that concept (Koselleck, 2009: 101). This shows that the role of language is an ultimate and methodologically irreducible aspect of historical research. The meaning and usage of words do not correspond symmetrically to the so-called reality of a specific historical period. Concepts and reality each have their own history and these histories, although referring to each other, change in different ways (Koselleck, 2009: 38). In studying the period between 1750 and 1850, Koselleck finds that all the concepts in use show a deep, long-term shifting of experience, in which the actual beginning of the modern age can be identified. The German scholar examines the conceptual categories that present specific routes of semantic innovation and notes the problematic comparison with an increasingly complex context of experience. This is mainly highlighted by the numerous concepts of “movement”, mostly coinciding with an “-ism”, where the increasingly explicit claim of historical change characterizing almost all the modern political subjects of movement finds its complete expression.

It is interesting to juxtapose the category of progress to that of decadence. Progress is a modern category, whose content of experience and consequence of expectation did not exist before 1750. Similarly, in the modern age, the premodern concepts of decadence or decline have gained a new topological placement. The notion of progress is tailored to describe modern experiences¹. The term “progress” expresses a modern concept because its history affirms that “progress” is different from “modern”, since its basic meaning – proceeding along a space – fell into oblivion, while the notions of decadence and decline did not succeed in erasing their natural and biological meaning. The new meaning of “progress” is given by the pair: experience of the past/expectation of the future. This new meaning represents modernity, which has generated unpredictable novelty that is hardly or not at all compatible with any past.

2.1. Globalization. Globalization² is a phenomenon with a multidimensional and multidisciplinary nature. Paradoxically, every phenomenon is traced back to globalization and it should be acknowledged that the difficulties in the

¹ Among such experiences: railways, cars, jet planes etc. (Koselleck, 2009: 52).

² There is a deceiving analogy between global and universal. Universal relates to human rights, culture and democracy; globalisation concerns techniques, market and information. Globalization appears to be irreversible, while universalization is on its way to extinction.

debate result from the complexity of the phenomenon and the struggle to understand it. At the end of the 20th century, this word took the space previously belonging to the term “modernization”. For the first time in history, the globe’s finitude emerged and this limit feeds back in social life; that is why the issue is relevant (Morin, 2004).

The cohesion of symbolic and value-based systems needs to be strong enough to retrieve some traits of traditional society. This is the sense in which the term “society” has been used for decades in common sense, indicating a social organization coinciding with the national state. Globalization, whatever it means, challenges such a representation (Giaccardi, Magatti, 2001). In the 20th century, the protest movements of the 60’s and 70’s wiped out the hope of reproducing society and its internal order through tradition and political indication of the goals to be reached. If there is a legacy from that period, it is the recomposition of subjectivity and social order.

Harvey (1993) and Castells (1996; 2002) study the reorganization and assessment of the forces that are demolishing the spatialization of social life imposed by national states. What is created is a globalized financial system that is increasingly detached from any political or territorial grounding, but also from the real economy itself. The structural dimension of globalization centres on the macrostructural level, and it is actually a push to demolish the spatialization of social life imposed by national states (Harvey, 1993). In this new situation, a reorganization of subjective experience is required. The awareness of living in one context is a distinctive element of our times. In the globalized world we can no longer ignore what happens elsewhere. The events occurring in a given location have a very wide resonance. Furthermore, with cinema, television, videogames, fashion, sport, social networks etc., the chance of being subjected to cognitive risks and stimulations increases for children, youngsters and adults. Very often all mediations between local and global are skipped, thus directly exposing the individual to flows coming from heterogeneous and distant spatial contexts, in an order that is neither sequential nor predefined in any way. The short-circuits between local and global involve the real and the possible as well. This process of expanding possibilities and collective risks can hardly be controlled. Material factors by themselves are not sufficient to explain social behaviour, because most of the meaning of human experience remains in the shade. In fact, individuals should be studied not only as rational actors or representatives of classes, strata or other social groupings, but also as producers of meaning and manipulators of symbols.

This places us before a reality in which culture calls into question passions that surpass the merely economic or political level. Understanding the cultural bases of conflicts and of past and current misunderstandings may help avoid repeating costly mistakes. Such understanding will enable us to live our personal and professional lives as informed and efficient citizens, in a world in which cultures, as well as society, are changing faster than ever.

Very often the term “globalization” is passed off for homogenization, but most of the processes and relations do not affect the rest of the world: the term “transnational”, though less grandiose, is more appropriate. Globalization means interconnection at an increasingly greater distance, even within national borders. From the early years of their lives, individuals are exposed to a recombination, unique and different every time, of worlds that are distant in space and in time, and that social or cultural belongingness cannot control and standardize (Hannerz, 2001: 10). This historic moment should promote school teaching and strengthen the educational resource, considering the fact that relations and interactions among individuals – as well as their belonging to a collective identity or community – are less and less governed by relations of spatial proximity. The fact of being spatially close (or far away) no longer guarantees closeness (or distance) in a cultural, emotional and/or project-related perspective (Hannerz, 2001:12).

In a historical period in which the concept of embodied mind, according to which mind and body are joined (Damasio, 1995), has become established, Morin (2007) also observes that scientific culture cannot be detached from humanistic culture and speaks of a kind of teaching whose task is preparing “well-made heads”. The sense is that of a head with something more than notion-driven traditions of knowledge: “something more” is not merely acquiring information, which sometimes is not enough for untangling a given situation; but rather the ability to think, and in order to think, the different kinds of thinking need to be mingled. Hybridization leads to a “well-made head”. Therefore, there is a need for a reform of thought.

2.2. Terminological problems. Several terms with the same object of knowledge are used, such as globalization, interculturality, pluralism and cosmopolitanism. In order to understand the meaning of the term “interculturality”, as it occurs with intersubjectivity and incorporeity, we run into a sphere whose feature of intermediarity cannot be brought back to universal laws. What happens between us does not belong to each individual, nor

does it belong to us together. A “no man’s land” cannot be built because it is not possible to connect and separate at the same time; we may only separate our own culture from an extraneous one. Both of these have in themselves something “more” that cannot be taken away because one of the two cultures would then disappear (Tessarolo, 2013).

Globalization is made easier by the web network, use of social media and electronic mail; all these online approaches provide an extended chance of meeting³. Beck (1999) explains why the cosmopolitan look is a cosmopolitan look. The term “cosmopolitan” is the opposite of “patriotic”: patriotism is unilateral, small, practical, useful, it makes one happy and quiet; cosmopolitanism is glorious, great. Nowadays reality itself has become cosmopolitan: global risks and global media involve all mankind simultaneously. The cosmopolitan look is the result and the assumption of a conceptual restructuring of perception. This kind of look forgets the humanity and individuality of human beings. The national dimension and the cosmopolitan dimension should be regarded as complementary for redefining the national and local dimension (Beck, 2003: 17-18).

To conclude, in a globalized world the only possible defence force needs to be placed above the economic and social reality. Touraine (2012) appeals to the universal rights of all human beings, i.e. the right to existence and freedom.

In the global society, the tendency should be toward lessening discrimination and sub-representation of minorities, particularly in states that are defined as multi-ethnic or multinational; but this is not the case, because daily life takes place in a local reality, not in an imaginary reality called “global society”. In his essay *Oltre le nazioni* [Beyond the nations] (2019), Bauman mentions “imaginary communities”. He affirms that all communities are imaginary and the global community is no exception; imagination, however, becomes a powerful and coagulating force if it is supported by institutions of self-identification and collective self-government, as is the case for modern nations and the sovereign states to which they give rise. The exercising of sociological imagination⁴ brings a sudden feeling of enlightenment to the minds of men that moved only within a system of closed circles, as if finally opening their eyes in a “house” that they thought they knew. They experience a

transposition of values and do so by means of reflection and sensitivity, grasping the cultural meaning of social sciences. This kind of imagination is the most fruitful form of such awareness (Bauman, 2002).

According to Simmel (1998), the term “society” indicates a circle of individuals connected by reciprocity, and a circle of individuals is an area of intersection of several circles. If it is a small circle, i.e. undifferentiated and not numerous, there is no risk for a person of undertaking a process of individualization. If the circle is or becomes larger, a person can develop their sense of autonomy. Over the last decades, we have witnessed a shifting from a society of shared rules to a society of individualized risks and discontinuous change.

Morin (2007) in his book on the “well-made head” affirms that in such a problematic time, traditional education systems should no longer prepare one-dimensional mind-sets, but open minds. Furthermore, he insists on the urgency of educating in a different way, by rethinking methodological issues – understanding that as an aid for facing the challenge of complexity – and by providing a precise and articulated sense for the term “complexity”, which is often used simply to express an inability to describe or explain. Morin (2007) suggests developing a citizenship – and therefore knowledge and responsibility – that does not replace the traditional national, regional and local ones; but that integrates all of them and sets the foundations for new individual and collective identities, which may be multiple, flexible, complex, evolutionary. This new humanism will have to enhance and connect the individual and collective diversities of the human species, because it is only by mobilizing the whole variety of past and present human experiences that a new and fruitful process of coevolution of the planet may be initiated.

The emergence of a new “order of time” that seems to quickly propagate through all layers of society is the distinctive dimension of modernity, making our age an exemplary “new time”. Vocabulary progressively soaks up expressions aimed at reflectively articulating a new conception of time, such as history, progress, crisis, revolution, emancipation.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Koselleck (2007) proposes an original deconstruction of the order of time for modernity, based on the sophisticated hermeneutical use of an innovative pair of categories: “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation”. This is an interpretive

³ The term “offline” conveys a sense of loss, of going in the background – as compared with being “online”, a virtual presence on the Internet.

⁴ The idea of a sociological imagination was presented by American sociologist Wright Mills.

perspective in which concrete history always matures in the midst of specific experiences and specific expectations that define the new time, the groups that effectively work to fulfill the social and political movement (Koselleck, 2007: 303). The specific purpose of conceptual history is to historically show the shifting of the coordination between experience and expectation and its transformation over the course of history, thus giving rise to diversified modes of experiencing historical time. The pairing of the experience/expectation categories recurs as the authentic keystone of a reconstructive system dominated by the reference to a composite, uneven temporality; a system that was cancelled or fell into oblivion while proceeding along a certain space. The visual reference disappeared from the etymology of the word “progress”⁵ (Koselleck, 2007:52).

Man must proceed towards the unknown, uncertainty, insecurity, while trying to achieve both security and freedom in the best way possible. However, there are ways to create interculturality understood as an encounter of cultures: also accepting the cultures of others (at least knowing and respecting them), acknowledging the relationship between cultural experiences and looking for what draws us together; finally, a recomposition of the world (considering that cultures are ways to handle changes). A universal culture is utopia; perhaps it is not even desirable because the pleasure of diversity and interest would disappear. When entering a new group, anyone – child or adult – has to adapt because somehow they are extraneous⁶ and need to find a “way in”.

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⁵ The origin is from Latin: *progressus*, from *progredi*, to advance, consisting of *pro* (forward) and *gradi* (to walk). The advance of progress proceeds step by step, because he who proceeds must be wise and look where he sets his foot, trying the ground and calibrating the direction every time. The positivistic explosion of progress, with the illusion of infinite progress, suffers the disconnection from this image: the advancing of progress is not infinite, but indefinite.

⁶ From Latin, *extraneus*, external/outside.