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Globalization and Cultural Diversity

Building Trans-Cultural Standards.
On Demolishing the Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Dumitru Bortun[1]

Abstract: The relationship between the individual and intercultural communication becomes clear when we understand culture within the cultural anthropology paradigm. From this point of view, any individual is the barer of a certain culture (subculture, sub-subculture etc.), and interindividual communication is an intercultural one. That is why the issue of tolerance between individuals and groups becomes *an issue of the efficient communication and mutual understanding between cultures*. My research on demolishing the barriers to intercultural communication aims not only to institutionalized communication (between governments or national organizations), but also to communication between well established cultural communities, with a strong identity (linguistic, ethnic or religious communities): they regard any act of communication, including here the *international* professional one (where the main barriers dwell in the communication between national cultures). I think that in its current shape, based on economic criteria (which *split* rather than *unify*), the European Union does not offer enough "common tasks" in order to give birth to a new *Pan-European civic culture*, as a variety of the third culture. But, a European Federation could offer the political, economical, social and cultural framework necessary for the achievement of what Casmir called "the third culture".

Key words: culture; identity; civic culture; intercultural communication; the third culture

1. Introduction

The relationship between the individual and intercultural communication becomes clear when we understand culture within the cultural anthropology paradigm – for instance, as defined by E. B. Tylor, T. Parsons and Chombart de Lauwe. In the introductory study to *Images de la Culture* called "Systemes de valeurs et aspirations culturelles", Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe classified the culture approaches as follows: (1) culture as the individual's development within society, (2) culture as a feature of a particular society or social milieu and (3) the problem of developing a universal culture (Chombart de Lauwe, 1970, pp. 14-21). It is obvious that out of the three approaches, that one that does not involve a previous evaluation and does not lead to a hierarchialisation of cultures (societies, groups and individuals) is the second one. It will also be the privileged referential of the present essay, because it is the one that suits best its objectives. The second approach goes mostly with Anglo-Saxon culturalists. Thus, E. B. Tylor sees culture as "the whole complex incorporating knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and all the other possibilities and practices acquired by an individual as member of a society" (*ibidem*, p. 17). Another anthropologist, school founder, F. Boas, completes this definition: "the products of human communities determined by their practices" (*idem*).

The largest acceptance (and most proper to my aim) is the one given by T. Parsons, for whom culture is "organized feelings and beliefs", representing "common values that are essential to a system of action proper to a society" (*ibidem*, p. 18). Parsons puts in practice, in the paradigm of actionalism that

[1] Associate Professor, PhD, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, Address: 6 Povernei str., Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, Tel.: +4021.318.08.97, fax: +4021.312.25.35, Corresponding author: dumitru.bortun@comunicare.ro.

what Max Weber said: "The concept of culture is a concept of value" (2), in the sense of a tight relation between values and symbols with the material transformations they cause or they are caused by. In this essay I am trying to continue putting them into practice by introducing such concepts as *problematisation technique, cultural paradigm* and *cultural referential*. Insisting upon the role of infrastructure generating desires and systems of value, Chombart de Lauwe considers that "a culture is marked by a range of models, guiding images and representations affecting the behavior, work, roles and social relations of the members of a certain society" (*ibidem*, p. 19). He calls upon the equal importance of techniques, space organization, production and work or consumption[1].

From this point of view, any individual is the barer of a certain culture (subculture, sub-subculture etc.), and interindividual communication is an intercultural one. That is why the issue of tolerance between individuals and groups becomes *an issue of the efficient communication and mutual understanding between cultures*. My research on demolishing the barriers to intercultural communication aims not only to institutionalized communication (between governments or national organizations), but also to communication between well established cultural communities, with a strong identity (linguistic, ethnic or religious communities): they regard any act of communication, including here the *international* professional one (where the main barriers dwell in the communication between national cultures).

Now let us take a look at the barriers in intercultural communication.

2. Ways of Thinking

In her book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), Susanne K. Langer reached the conclusion that every symbolic system is solider to a certain mental organization by means of which individuals understand their world (3). For Langer, a certain historical époque is characterized by a certain way of problematising – more precisely, by a certain "technique" of people to ask questions about their surrounding world. And this "technique" limits and decides the way the answers are coming – in other words, it predetermines the way the ideas, ideologies and concepts about the world are formulated. Individuals are always aware of the ideas, the questions they answer to – quite seldom, and the problematisation "technique" – almost never (anyway, in what the ordinary individual is concerned – never).

Verbal communication is achieved by *ideas*, and it is exactly this precise level that communication accidents are solved or tried to be solved. Common interlocutors question the nature of the *questions* quite seldom (this is achieved only in the so-called *specialized conversations* – scientific debates, political negotiations – inaccessible to the common senses). *The technique of asking the questions* is not analyzed by anybody (except for the specialists). Let's just take a look at an example provided by Susanne Langer.

The question "*Who made the world?*" can be answered: "*It was made by mere fortune!*", or "*Love and hate made it!*" or "*God made it*!". But if somebody answers "*Nobody made it!*", they offer an apparent answer, unable to satisfy the one who has asked the question. The way their mind is organized does not lead them to the question "*Who made the world*?"; for them, the question bares a false problem. Around the answers to this question, concepts about this world are created, involving one or several creators (mythologies, polytheist and monotheist religions). All of them are due to the same "technique" of asking questions (and raising problems) and to the same mental organization. Of course, they differ from one époque or culture to another due to the different *problematisation*

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[1] The acceptance above suits me best, as it allows me to approach ideologies (including nationalism) as *forms of a culture*, and this facilitates methodologically the de-ideologisation of the ideology analysis. Analyzing or interpreting an ideology only as ideology compels us to using new instruments, again, ideological. Any non-cultural approach to ideology is necessarily paradigmatic, that is to say *ideological*. Any approach at the same level (that is ideological) becomes circular; it would not facilitate communication, but instead it would offer dogmatic ideologists new "arguments" for confrontation. The cultural approach favors a decentralization of our vision, generating a neutral language in relation to the languages of the current rival ideologies.

"techniques" on the world and to the different *mental organizations* (intellectual, imaginary, symbolic)[1]. The corresponding relationship between the lack of the problematisation "technique" and mental organization generating the question *"Who made the world?"* from a certain life horizon and the fact that that cultural horizon is dominated by atheism is self-understood (cf. Langer, 1942, p. 3-4).

Of great importance to our theme is analyzing how possible is *communication as transfer of aware ideas*. It is obvious that such communication between interlocutors who do not share the same mental organization is not possible, because:

a) every answer provided by any of the interlocutors will represent for the other *the rejection of his question*;
b) despite the common vocabulary, *there is no common language*.

The most obvious conclusion is *the impossibility of communication, in the sense of modifying one's interlocutor's way of thinking – aware modification assumed by the latter.* And this is the only assumption we are interested from the perspective of communication between cultures and/or ideologies. Otherwise, communication can only be regarded as a one-way "process", as manipulation or tame, as a source of alienation, and it can be exercised on undemocratic and anti-humanitarian purposes, the way it has often been practiced in modern times.

The doubts concerning the possibility of an authentic intercultural communication have come into being as a result of spotting some objective limits of the ability of language to function as a universal currency and which make communication either an impossible, or an incomplete act. The fact is despairing as these limits do not belong to interlocutors, but to *language itself*, and spring from the *nature of the act of acquiring knowledge*. What are these limits, how do they take effect and under what circumstances can they be surpassed? These are the questions that we must answer in order to find a rational answer to the fundamental question: *Is an authentic tolerance between individuals and/or groups belonging to different cultures possible?* Because authentic tolerance requires more than an institutionally imposed «political correctness»: it requires an authentic communication that is an *aware* transfer[2].

3. Cultural Paradigms

A good way to start studying these phenomena is explaining what a "cultural paradigm" is; the term has been widely used over the past four decades in social philosophy, anthropology, psychology and sociology. It has been acquired by "concept translation", being borrowed from the philosophy of

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[1] We have to consider real communication as a transfer *made aware*, because the awareness of the transfer is a *sine qua non* condition for its double univocity. Of course, there is univocal communication, to which the receptor is highly oblivious (political propaganda, commercial advertisements or educational communication in the first school years). But when dealing with intercultural or inter-ideological communication, we must accept the existence of the double univocity, so we must perceive everything in the form of aware transfer.
I do not believe that the imitation of cultural models from another cultures, as it often happens in the Third World, where, by means of *Fashion*, Western ideas and conducts are being imported (but not ideologies and institutions) is an instance of the real intercultural communication (as *bi-directional* transfer of ideas, values, attitudes, even behaviors). Sooner or later, the social inefficiency of this type of unaware transfer will become relevant and its consequences will raise reactions, which generally take the form of anti-western attitudes. The way I see *real communication*, neither as culture "export" or "import", nor as cultural "aggression" and nor the violent reactions against the "aggressors" represent *efficient* forms of intercultural communication. Such communication not only that has no positive effect (it is inefficient), but it creates greater and more problems than those waiting for a solution. The terrorist attack on September the 11-th 2001 is just one of the effects of the failure in intercultural communication (it is right, one of maximum dramatism and maximum media visibility); it has been "cooked" by the long practice of the univocal cultural communication. If one could calculate the "efficiency" of such communication, in most cases this would be below one!
[2] For Ferdinand de Saussure, "the linguistic sign does not unify an object to a name, but a *concept* to an acoustic image" (de Saussure, 1998 - *our emphases*, D. B.). The signified is not the object, but the concept, that we know to be a cultural construct, not an (empirically) observed thing. Peirce's three-sided model places the "interpreter" between "representative" and "object", as we have seen, under the pressure of the social context, as revealed in norms and conventions that differ from one culture to another (Peirce, 1931).

science, where it has been imposed by the American philosopher Thomas S. Kuhn. He has noticed that the theories on the nature of science and the aim of the nature research are not in accordance with the scientific practice, the way it comes out of the history of science.

In practice, he says, scientists' behavior does not respect the canons defining *scientificity* and even *rationality* (canons present both in the philosophy of science and in the current mentality). The positivists, including here K. Popper (enemy of the logic empirism), considered that science differs from speculation by testing – either as a confirmation of the theory (Carnap), or as its declination ("falsifying") (Popper). For them, the central concept in characterizing the nature and dynamic of science is the "scientific theory", and the science/non-science separation criterion is *testability*. For Kuhn, the central concept is *paradigm*, and the scientificity criterion is *problem solving*.

Paradigms are models of scientific practice that we come across in the classical scientific works and, especially, in handbooks and treaties; they are the basement of instructing a certain scientific group (physicists, chemists etc.). they are the ones teaching the trainee to create and solve new problems. Thus, paradigms are "exemplary scientific achievements that, during a certain period, offer problems and model solutions to a community of practitioners" (Kuhn, 1976, p. 14).

Unlike the knowledge within the abstract lines of the theory and within the general methodological rules, the knowledge within paradigms is *tacit*. Paradigms guide the members of a certain scientific group in solving the new problems, without their realizing the paradigm step by step. They apply it – sometimes, even in a creative manner –, but they are not able to enclose it in general statements.

The fact that the members of one scientific group share one common paradigm explains that fact they their communication is almost complete and runs without major difficulty; it also explains the unanimity of their professional judgments. This does not hold good with the scientists who use different paradigms, as *paradigms are incommensurable* (they cannot be compared, as there is no common "measure unit").

The incommensurability of the paradigms is caused by the following facts:

   i) they imply *incompatible presuppositions* on the base entities of the study field and their behavior;
   ii) they require *different criteria* in order to limit the "real" problems and "legitimate" solutions;
   iii) the *conclusions* drawn by researchers on the same reality are *incommensurable* as well.

How can one explain the incommensurability of the observations? Although they aim "in the same direction and at the same point" (Kuhn), although the sensorial apparatus is the same, researchers will perceive different things. This happens because of the tacit knowledge within paradigms; it blocks the route stimuli-perception. This is exactly the situation analyzed by the founders of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charls Peirce[1].

This generates a "crack in communication" (Kuhn); the adepts of one paradigm cannot convince the adepts of the rival paradigm of the superiority of their point of view, and they won't be able to understand and accept the others' point of view. The arguments of the two parts will be circular (they can only be understood and accepted by the researchers who *already* work in the same paradigm).

Kuhn's theory buries for good the ideal of the complete communication by means of a universal language and the idea of progress in objectivity as drawing nearer to a pre-existing *Truth*, by means of an *Ideal Language*. This theory reveals the relativity of any communication, generated not by the "communicational incompetence", but by the nature of language and knowledge itself.

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[1] This situation is similar to the one in the United States, where the social roles of males and females are being questioned. Many of the preoccupied ones aim at "equality with males" – equality based on a system of values elaborated by males. None of the females' protests has aimed at the construction of a third culture, as a starting point for emancipation. In my opinion, such an aim would become a serious threat for the "sexist males" and, generally speaking, for all "conservators", because it would request a *cultural redefinition of the entire society*, equating a change of the existing order, a social revolution.

Enough to replace Kuhn's concept with the concept of "cultural paradigm" in order to realize that the limits in the communication between scientists hold valid for the communication between any human groups – while any group can be considered a cultural or sub-cultural community (ethnic communities, social classes, professional guilds, political parties etc.). Two rival paradigms are enough (in other words, rivaling for *the same domain of reality*), to give birth to obstacles in communication.

I will define cultural paradigm as a *constellation of values, beliefs and methods (including problematisation "techniques") belonging to a certain community at a given moment.*

Now we will prove that Kuhn's observations of "scientific groups" stay valid:

1. the rival paradigm representatives speak about different matters, even when they look "from the same point" and "in the same direction";
2. competition between rival paradigms is not solved by arguments of deeds;
3. the rival paradigm representatives do not agree upon the "really important matters";
4. communication between them is always partial;
5. the rival paradigm representatives are always within different worlds (they see different *things* in a different *correlation*);
6. complete communication is only possible within the same paradigm;
7. the transition from one paradigm to another can take place from different reasons, with no relation to the logical demonstration or to the empirical "proofs".

3. The Third Culture

The surpassing of the communication barriers, inherent to cultural pluralism, in order to achieve an authentic communication has been approached as a practical problem (although solved by theoretical means) by Fred L. Casmir and Nobleza C. Assuncion-Lande. Coming from a *sui generis* life horizon, with an (inter)cultural experience that only the United States could offer, the two authors published in 1990 the study "*Intercultural Communication Revisited: Conceptualization, Paradigm Building and Methodological Approaches*" (Casmir & Assuncion-Lande, 1990, pp. 278-309).

After reviewing the previous efforts in theorizing intercultural communication, Casmir notices he must retain not the successes of these theories, but rather its failures and the uncertainties left behind. The method taken over by Casmir is that of rejection of cultural dominance; he is trying to find the opportunities for a mutual development of some cultures in proximal interaction, like the ones living together within the American society.

The novelty Casmir brings about is the fact that his analytical model is designed within the "both-and" paradigm; thus, he overtakes the obvious limits of *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, currents considered by many authors to be the "ultimate word" in post-modern, democratic and de-centered approaches (set free from the traps of ethnocentrism – Euro-centrism, respectively). From my point of view, multiculturalism and interculturalism (that is to say the "swan song" of multiculturalism) are the prisoners of the "either-or" paradigm, which we consider a factor generating identity conflict during the history (including the history of Europe)[1].

So far, a series of approaches have not offered practical solutions for surpassing the barriers in communication and the intercultural communication surrogates (for instance, the "dialogue of the

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[1] With Casmir we come across another approach of intercultural communication: an "spatial" and not a "flat" approach, as an architect would put it. The "flat" approach is specific to *multiculturalism*, which only takes note of the existence of several cultures and legitimates them. *Interculturalism* was a step forward, as it requires the inter-knowledge and communication between these cultures. In my opinion, this stays an important desire, but unachievable in the current state of the history: we are in full ethic idealism. In order to realize this, it is enough to read the collective volume *Quelle identité pour l'Europe?* guided by Riva Kastoryano. The volume is a proof of the failure of multiculturalism as a way of approaching intercultural communication: it offer no credible ways to achieving a co-operation policy and neither to constructing a super-national identity without the risk of destroying national identities (see Kastoryano, 1998).

dumb" between NATO and the Slobodan Milosevic Government). Until these approaches themselves are overtaken, many political objectives will remain simple desires. For instance, in the current paradigm, the cultural unification of Europe in democratic terms, that is to say not within the "dominance-serving" frame, seems an absurdity. By "absurdity" I do not mean impossibility, *but the border separating possibility and impossibility*. And, as we have already seen, a change in paradigm can turn the possible into impossible, but also the other way round: *it can turn the impossible into possible*. Such a paradigm transpires out of Casmir's theory. The main conclusion of his analysis is that, given his synthesis capacity, which is specifically human, the construction of such a concrete historical situation where intercultural communication may become possible and not limit itself to a simple technology export/import is achievable. Such situations are defined by the concept "the third culture".

Although relying on different, sometimes opposed, perceptions and behaviours, the individuals belonging to two different cultures create, through their interaction, a single framework for this interaction. As a result of the conjunction of the two cultures, a *third culture* comes into being, wider than the former ones and taken over by the both sides (the individuals belonging to these sides).

Within the third culture, the original ones can communicate better than in the case the third culture is missing. Thus, the third culture is not just a result of the fusion of two or more entities, but rather the product of their mutual "harmonizing" and becoming the components of a coherent whole. That is why the individual study of the original cultures will not reveal the base rules of the communication within the third one.

Casmir calls the third culture a "situational subculture", within which the individuals in interaction can adjust their temporary behavior for as long are they pursue common aims. Within the common efforts of mutual adjustment, individuals *accumulate and experience of their common aspects*, which can later provide them with starting points for new interactions.

For Casmir, the third culture is not to be achieved by spiritual perfection or by mere education (although education can support this process, and its final outcome can be regarded as spiritual perfection). The third culture is to be achieved *only* under the pressure of an *objective and constraining* situation: when culturally non-similar persons are forced to co-operate in fulfilling some tasks that they have all agreed upon as compulsory. Casmir proposes some of the characteristics of the third culture:

1) *it is open*: it is able to incorporate new elements and thus to develop;
2) *it is expansive*: it can enlarge its contextual limits, being able to include new situations of communication (individual, organizational, institutional or mediating);
3) *it is sensitive to provocation*: it responds to the new requests generated by the continuous adjustments and re-adjustments, necessary in order to alienate the participants' perceptions and expectations (in regard to one another or to the situation that forces them to intercultural co-operation and communication);
4) *it is future-oriented*: the third culture is the beginning and not the end of a common enterprise. This orientation causes anticipation attitudes (in relation to a possible situation and an increased communication).

I consider that the close analysis of the third culture and its reason to be is very important to the development of mankind in the globalization era. It has become a pressing problem just because of the fact that people have become aware of the major importance of the cultural import/export. On the one hand, this process is regarded as a "cultural rape" (see the Walt Disney movies), on the other hand, the reaction caused by this perception can generate major conflicts (see the Gulf War, the NATO involvement in Yugoslavia, the USA actions in Afghanistan), or insane strategies, inspired by the fear of the "cultural imperialism" (see Mao's "cultural revolution" or Ceausescu's old-fashioned nationalism). From my point of view, these effects are the result of the collision between a presence and an absence: the presence of the "cultural determinism" idea and the absence of the "third culture" idea – and with it, the constructive effort that this idea generates and presupposes.

All these experiences lead to the conclusion that the *replacement strategies* are not productive, they cause failures in cultural communication, rejection and even conflicts. The Catholic Church experience, the UNO experiences (see Magee, 9) are not to be overlooked in studying the obstacles to communication and can constitute the basement of the third culture theory.

Casmir's developments and analyses have generated not only conclusions, but also questions:

1. Is *a new ethic code* of intercultural communication possible or even necessary?
2. What are the *aims of the researches* on intercultural communication?
3. How should we *practically* approach intercultural communication, keeping in mind the fact that an ethic and efficient communication depends on all the participants of a certain culture (not just its representatives)?
4. Does anybody have the right to impose its own *communicational behavior standards*, baring in mind that fact that changing one's communicational behavior means cultural change (and equates a "cultural rape")?

The questions above are vital for a possible theory of the intercultural tolerance or, in other words, a possible *unified theory of tolerance*, which can outline the conditions to *efficient*, and *ethic* communication and co-operation. In the framework of the post-positivist epistemology, of cultural pluralism and the relativism generated by the incommensurability of the cultural paradigms, the answers to the questions above depend on the solution to the fundamental dilemma: *Is the construction of trans-cultural communicational standards, of a trans-cultural code of the communicational behavior possible?*

Thus, the pessimism towards the possibility of an authentic intercultural communication and an authentic intercultural tolerance justified only by the classical paradigm, where cultures are regarded in their objectivity, as exterior, immuable and out of the communicational context. The *third culture* idea brings about a new paradigm, which constraints the participants to communication to take part in the fulfillment of certain common tasks, being forced to adapt their references mutually and progressively, in the process of communication. The flat and contemplative descriptionalism of "multiculturalism" and the idealist and utopic activism of "interculturalism" are overcome by a new point of view in which the human subject (individual or collective) can build a new trans-cultural vision, a "common house" where communication can be efficient. In such a paradigm, none of the subjects is to elaborate a communicational code, so that one culture or another can impose its own communicational standards. This becomes a false problem!

In the constraining situation of a "common task", the codes and standards appear by themselves, during the process of communication. The role of the specialists in communication (academicians, researchers or workers in social communication) is to facilitate the mutual adjustments of the cultures within the "common task" situation (Casmir), to keep a record of the progress and to make the participants aware of them. The willing assumption of the new standards is the starting point for new mutual adjustments – and so on, in a process where communication has been unblocked. Are we not living in an era where more and more cultures are brought in the "common task" situation? What is, for instance, the European Union? I think that in its current shape, based on economic criteria (which *split* rather than *unify*), the European Union does not offer enough "common tasks" in order to give birth to a new *Pan-European civic culture*, as a variety of the third culture. But, a European Federation could offer the political, economical, social and cultural framework necessary for the achievement of what Casmir called "the third culture" (see Gabriel Andreescu & Adrian Severin, 2001, pp. 3-42)

Under the virtual conditions of a European Federation, the "common tasks" will inevitably multiply, but their cultural imperatives would seem more and more obvious for the Europeans. Realizing them faster could be substantially achieved by social communication, standardized in the social engineering terms (such engineering already exists and it is called *Public Relations*).

From within the new paradigm, the questions are different – less theoretical and their answers are easier to be found:

1. In a more and more interdependent world, how do we define *competence in intercultural communication*?
2. Which are the *instruction methods* that need to be developed in order to achieve this competence?
3. How can *communication and collaboration* between researchers, practitioners and intercultural communication subjects be facilitated?
4. How can *collaboration* be enlarged, so it can incorporate new cultures?
5. What *research types* should be supported for their usefulness for other cultures?
6. What *institutions* should we design in order to be able to use the products of the research work – not merely communicational, but also communicative institutions?

These questions are not theoretical, but practical and immediate. They address researchers and schoolmasters, experts and councilors, politicians and us all, those involved more or less from the professional point of view to social communication in general, but especially to the intercultural and inter-ideological one.

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