

**International Journal  
of Cross-Cultural Studies  
and Environmental Communication**

**Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014**

ISSN 2285 – 3324

ISSN-L = 2285 – 3324

DOI: (Digital Object Identifier):10.5682/22853324

**DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

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**International Journal  
of Cross-Cultural Studies  
and Environmental Communication**

<http://crosscultureenvironment.wordpress.com/>

**Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014**

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# WHAT IS PERSUASIVE ABOUT THE OLD AND THE NEW?

Rafael Jiménez Cataño<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: The evaluation of the persuasive force of being old or new comprises considerations that are both quantitative, i.e. regarding distance and relevance of context, and qualitative, i.e. regarding semantic and pragmatic content. The meaning of the terms antiquus and modernus has a history revealed to be parallel to that of the notion of progress, and to some extent explains the different sensitivities towards the old and the new, towards tradition and progress and, consequently, the argumentative use of such notions.*

*Keywords: ancient; modern; progress; tradition; persuasion; argumentation; topoi; argument from direction; generation gap.*

“Argumentum *ad antiquitatem*” and “argumentum *ad novitatem*” are part of our lexicon of fallacies. It is not these appeals, but rather the *real* persuasive force (or lack thereof) of indicating a certain thing or idea as old or new, which is the subject of the proposed reflections. Arguments constructed upon such a basis are present in many areas of debate, not only those currently in the media limelight. In the sphere of argumentation studies, there is greater consensus regarding fallacies as defective cases in argumentation schemes that would otherwise be valid.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the *ad auctoritatem* argument, we see the generalized tendency to immediately perceive such an argument as a fallacy, but it is clear that there can be a valid *ad auctoritatem* argumentation. Perelman explains the argument from authority as a type of argument from prestige and strongly defends its validity<sup>3</sup>: “The place that the argument from authority occupies in argumentation is significant, but one must keep in mind that, like any other argument, it should be taken together with other accords.”<sup>4</sup>

## 1. What is Old or New

The analysis of arguments from old and new leads immediately to the consideration of their relativity: their force depends upon other factors as well, not purely upon temporal distance. We can group such factors into two fields, one of which is quantitative, the other being qualitative. The first is temporal distance:

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Cross University, Rome.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Van Eemeren, Frans H., and Rob Grootendorst. *A systematic theory of argumentation. The pragma-dialectical approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 162 sqq.; Cattani, Adelino. *50 Discorsi ingannevoli: argomenti per difendersi, attaccare, divertirsi*. Padova: Edizioni GB, 2011, 63 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Perelman, Chaim, and Lucien Olbrechts-Tyteca. *Tratado de la argumentación: la nueva retórica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1989, §70, 469-476.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 473.

how far in the past must something be to be considered *old*? How near must something be to be considered *new*? Actually, distance itself is not enough for the analysis: it has to be put into context, a time segment which enables the distance to be considered short or long.

The qualitative aspect is the content. New is good or bad, and old is bad or good according to the subject, to the criterion of judgement. For each one of us, certain things are good, because they are new, and others are good, because they are old. Old or new clothes, old or new ideas, old or new fashion, old or new people, old or new buildings, old or new friends, old or new pottery, old or new music... The question put briefly is: what is the value – positive or negative – to be associated with new or old things?

### 1.1. Dimensions of Time

We must keep in mind that the opposition is not between the past and the future: in both arguments, the appeal is to the past, either the remote past or the recent past. However, we are accustomed to think that what is new opens up the future to us. The basis of such a manner of thinking is the human condition, the fact that human life has a beginning and an end, with a span of development in the middle. We can see this in the chapters of the *Rhetoric* (II, 12-14), devoted by Aristotle to the human ages: the future is more meaningful for the young, because it is part of the segment of time that very probably will be included in their life.<sup>5</sup> This is not the case for the old, for whom the past has a meaning that escapes the young.<sup>6</sup>

Both the old and the young have a past, but the former have lived a longer time than the latter. When the young do experience a change – something ends and something else begins –, they find that which has ended to be “old-fashioned”. Since the old have lived longer, what begins might be for them simply something that returns, that is, older than the *new* thing for young people, but old enough not to be recognized by the latter. This is the case of an erroneous sample in an argument from direction: while individuating an event or an object at a specific moment in a process, one judges it according to a non-representative segment of time.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2. Argument from Direction

The argument from direction is often presented as an *a priori* argument. However, there is actually a spontaneous use of direction that implies induction and comparison, such as in the evaluation of the historical moment of a law in a particular country by comparing it with a series of laws regarding a similar subject

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<sup>5</sup> “Their lives are mainly spent not in memory but in expectation; for expectation refers to the future, memory to the past, and youth has a long future before it and a short past behind it” (*Rhetoric*. II, 12, 1389a21-23).

<sup>6</sup> “They live by memory rather than by hope; for what is left to them of life is but little as compared with the long past; and hope is of the future, memory of the past” (*Rhetoric*. II, 13, 1390a6-8).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Perelman, *op. cit.* §66, 434-443.



in other countries, or the comprehension of a behaviour by situating its place in the age of a human being. Perelman classifies it among arguments that are based upon the structure of reality.<sup>8</sup>

The argument from direction is *a priori* as far as it consists in grasping an essence and the conclusion that derives therefrom as a natural development in time. It is not *a priori* insofar as it begins with the reality of a process and arrives at particular conclusions through the individuation of an object or an event in a process; in fact, it is a type of informal reasoning. For the soundness of the argument, one must take into account the relevance of the chosen segment and the nature of the series of events (e.g., necessity, causality, etc.). The precautions necessary in applying this argumentation are similar to those to be applied in the analysis of a possible *slippery slope* argument. Perelman actually groups these arguments together.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The Semantic and Pragmatic History of “Modern” and “Ancient”

The history of semantic and pragmatic relations between the terms “modern” and “ancient” can be very illustrative in this regard. The inclination to value positively what is modern was not always linked to common sense. There have been several *modernities*, and not all of them related in the same way with the times of their predecessors. A historian of philosophy writes:

There is very little content to the concept of modernity except as a term of contrast with antiquity and the Middle Ages, and what is signified as “modern” changes, depending upon the specific contrast one wishes to make. Historians often use the term to designate nineteenth-century phenomena such as the industrial revolution, the rise of capitalism, the institution of representative democracy, and urbanization. In philosophy, “modernity” is usually taken to refer to the period that discarded medieval or scholastic philosophy, beginning roughly in the sixteenth century and encompassing such intellectual movements as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation, continuing in the seventeenth with what is called the Age of Reason (early modern philosophy), and culminating in the eighteenth with the Enlightenment.

Of course, all of the terms above are imprecise and disputed, but few will disagree that the work of René Descartes typifies early modern philosophy and sets the agenda for the philosophers who came after him.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted, first of all, that “*modernus*” comes from “*modo*”, which means “now”. The modern is that which is now. This term, “*modernus*”, has had a

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 438.

<sup>10</sup> Ariew, Roger. “Modernity”. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*. Ed. R. Pasnau. Cambridge (UK) – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 114.

strictly temporal meaning, “which can be attested to at least from the fifth-sixth centuries, specifically as found within certain letters of Pope Gelasius I (492-496) and in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus (485-480).”<sup>11</sup>

An evolution in this terminology is to be found in the period from late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, whose development is particularly noticeable between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. It is there that we find a modernity, certainly the most important modernity before that to which we are accustomed. In a study that is very significant historiographically, Marie-Dominique Chenu writes, after some examples of various meanings of the terms:

Before a meaning thus characterized, we cannot any longer accept the univocal interpretation that the historians of medieval doctrines sometimes give of the terms *antiqui-moderni*. It is easy to distinguish the various senses that, depending upon the context, they may take:

1. *Antiqui* can represent the authors of Greek-Latin antiquity as opposed to the writers of the Christian era, *moderni*. (...) Boethius [5<sup>th</sup> century] in this sense is called a modern. (...)
2. *Antiqui* represents the writers of the first Christian centuries (Fathers) and *moderni* the doctors of the Middle Ages.
3. *Antiqui* also means the followers of the old Covenant, as opposed to the *moderni*, the followers of Christian revelation. This is the obvious meaning of these words used in the question regarding dogmas in the economy of salvation: “*Utrum una sit fides modernorum et antiquorum*” S. Thomas, *De Ver.*, q.14, a.12.
4. Then (...), during the twelfth century, *antiqui* and *moderni* assume a meaning which relates to the stages of the penetration of Aristotelian logic, *logica vetus*, *logica nova*. Abelard is thus “modern”, and Boethius is “old”.
5. We finally arrive at the special meaning which these terms held in the twelfth century, and that we have defined above.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.1. The Length of Modernity

Roger Bacon’s (1214-1294) use of the expression “*nos moderni*” is often cited. A study by Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964) on modern thought made famous this use in first person of the adjective *modernus*: “*Nos moderni*, disait déjà Roger

<sup>11</sup> Ghisalberti, Alessandro. “I moderni”. Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo: il Medioevo latino. Ed. G. Cavallo, C. Leonardi, E. Menestò. Roma: Salerno, 1982, 606.

<sup>12</sup> Chenu, Marie-Dominique. “Antiqui, moderni”. *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 17. 1928, 87-88. Cf. Hartmann, Wilfried. “‘Modernus’ und ‘Antiquus’: zur Verbreitung und Bedeutung dieser Bezeichnungen in der wissenschaftlichen Literatur vom 9. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert”. Zimmermann, Albert (ed.). *Antiqui und Moderni. Traditionsbewusstsein und Fortschrittsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter*. Berlin – New York: W. de Gruyter, 1974, 21; Grössmann, Elisabeth. “‘Antiqui’ und ‘Moderni’ im 12. Jahrhundert”. Zimmermann. op. cit. 43.

Bacon.”<sup>13</sup> This is interesting, of course, but the awareness of living among the *moderni* was quite common in the previous century. An example can be taken from Peter of Capua (c.1160-1214), a theologian with a historically relevant way of using logic in his reflections.<sup>14</sup> Around 1185, he answered a question in the following words: “Master Anselm [c. 1033-1109] and the ancients said that (...). On the contrary, Master Peter [Cantor: c.1130-1197] and almost all moderns say that (...).”<sup>15</sup>

The distance between the two masters is 97 years, according to the dates of birth. Shortly afterwards, Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) and Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) will consider William of Auxerre (c. 1150-1231), Prepositin of Cremona (c. 1150-1210), Philip the Chancellor (c. 1165-1236) and Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168/75-1253) to be among the *antiqui*.<sup>16</sup> The distance between the *moderni* and *antiqui* becomes even shorter, a brief 32 years.

According to the nature itself of the term (...) and to the passing of generations, the *moderni* become in their turn *antiqui*: the commentators of Peter Lombard, the *magister* par excellence, will soon take up the opinions of the *moderni* against him. Since the modern in and of itself does not exist, *modernitas*, at least materially, is an unstable value. Walter Map [12<sup>th</sup> century] calculates the length of time during which one remains modern as a hundred years. (...) He notes, however, that the *antiquitas* remains prestigious, from generation to generation, and that the *modernitas* has always been regarded with suspicion, almost to the point of being discredited, until the day that the halo of antiquity rehabilitates these *moderni* as ancients.<sup>17</sup>

The logical terminology in these centuries is highly illustrative. (When Chenu wrote his 1928 article, the historiography of medieval logic was not sufficiently developed, and he does fall into some inaccuracies.) There was a set of books, used in schools until the twelfth century, which included two works by Aristotle and a series of other texts. Most of these works were ancient, but one or two of them were also extremely recent. When other works by Aristotle were discovered, the entire set was named the *logica vetus*; the works of more recent discovery were instead called the *logica nova*. The epistemological revolution that followed such a discovery (modern science would arrive shortly after) allowed for

<sup>13</sup> Koyré, Alexandre. “La pensée moderne”. Le Livre, 4<sup>e</sup> année, nouvelle série, mai 1930, n° 1, 1. It appears at least three times in Oxford Greek Grammar.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Jiménez Cataño, Rafael. “Copulatio in Peter of Capua (12th Century) and the Nature of the Proposition”. Studies on the History of Logic. Ed. I. Angelelli, M. Cerezo. Berlin - New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996, 197-208.

<sup>15</sup> “Magister Anselmus et illi antiqui dixerunt quod (...). Magister vero Petrus et fere omnes moderni dicunt quod (...)” (Peter of Capua. Summa theologiae. q.11, Codex 51, Biblioteca Municipale di Todi, f. 7v<sup>o</sup> a).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Chenu, “Antiqui, moderni”, 86-87.

<sup>17</sup> Chenu, La teologia nel dodicesimo secolo, 440.

the creation of new treatises of logic, which received the name of *logica modernorum*, while the collection of *logica vetus* and *logica nova* now became the *logica antiquorum*.

Then with the characterization of realism as the *via antiqua* and nominalism as the *via moderna* we read:

To the *via antiqua* belong Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Giles of Rome, i.e., the proponents of 'realism' and of the use of Aristotelianism in the field of theology; to the *via moderna* belong instead Ochkam, Gregory of Rimini, Buridan, Peter D'Ailly, Marsilius of Inghen, Adam Woodham, John Dorp, Albert of Saxony.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Axiology and Progress

The evaluations of modernity cited in this article are primarily positive. In order to complete our perspective on modernity, negative evaluations, perhaps surprising for contemporary man, should also be presented.

For Marsilius of Padua (1275-1342), whose thought is in sharp contrast with the Church of Rome,

the "*via moderna*" is that of his opponents, of the Roman pontiffs and their supporters, to whose "*modernitas*" (...) is attributed the quite negative sense of "error" and "aberration". The "*perversa opinio*" of Roman bishops constitutes an innovation that not only is not based upon the guarantee of the "*antiqua tempora*", i.e., the past, but intends to subvert the past itself and must be completely rejected.<sup>19</sup>

Humanism, the prelude or first phase of the Renaissance, might be assumed to evaluate modernity positively, but instead, the works of this period testify to "the definitely negative and polemical use of the term '*moderni*' by the major representatives of the first generations of humanists,"<sup>20</sup> such as Petrarch.

#### 3.1 Modernity as an Identity

In the modernity of the twelfth century, there is a semantic-pragmatic element of decisive importance: a positivity that does not imply a negative evaluation of antiquity. Alessandro Ghisalberti characterized such a modernity as the "ability of the authors of that century to propose themselves as creators of a new tradition in regard to the classics and their ancient commentators."<sup>21</sup> For the first time, "*modernus*" did not signify merely a period of time: it pointed towards

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<sup>18</sup> Ghisalberti, op. cit. 630.

<sup>19</sup> Piaia, Gregorio. "'Antiqui', 'moderni' e 'via moderna' in Marsilio da Padova". Zimmermann. op. cit. 341.

<sup>20</sup> Vasoli, Cesare. "Intorno al Petrarca ed ai logici 'moderni'". Zimmermann. op. cit. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Ghisalberti, op. cit. 609.

an identity, the awareness of being “creators of a new tradition.” This is the essential meaning of Bernard of Chartres’ (+ 1124/30) famous formulation: “We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants and see farther than they.”<sup>22</sup> Here is the substance of progress in a cumulative sense.

Throughout the aforementioned centuries, the new treatises of logic were called “*magna logicalia*” or “*logica maior*” when they developed the subjects of the *logica antiquorum*; they received the name of “*parva logicalia*” or “*logica minor*” when they were concerned with the subjects of the *logica modernorum*. The spirit of such a terminology was clear: we are small; the ancients were big. In this perspective, the persuasive value of ancient and modern can be formulated as such: the ancient is good – the modern is better. There is no animosity. Without the ancient masters, we would not be what we are.

Obviously, all this can be very complex, varying from author to author, and from discipline to discipline. However, it is important for us to be aware of the possibility of this axiology as well as its concrete historical existence, because the axiology of contemporary man is that of seventeenth century modernity, which is not inclined to recognize the worth of our ancestors. The current axiology of the new and the old (the modern is good – the ancient is bad) is inextricably linked to our feelings about progress, although perhaps phrased in other words, such as “tradition” and “modernity”. I will not dwell on this axiology precisely because it is more well-known; rather, I would like to point out the connection between this feeling and the manner of understanding progress as a continuous movement towards the better.

The modernity of the seventeenth century presented a new concept of progress, exemplified in Francis Bacon as “*victoria cursus artis super naturam*.”<sup>23</sup> When the other Bacon, Roger, had called himself *modernus*, he was already aware of progress, but understood it in a different manner. If our understanding of progress proceeds from the assumption that we, with the development of reason, are able to dominate nature, it is natural that we do not feel the need to take into account those who have preceded us. If we understand progress to be an experience of growth achieved within a certain period, it is natural that we tend to recognize the merits of those that preceded us. This explains the reason why, whereas earlier there was a continuous transition from being modern to being ancient, today, after four centuries, Descartes continues to be called “modern”.

#### 4. Formulations of Common Places

From antiquity comes the most oft-repeated formulation of the common place of appreciation of the past: the *laudatio temporis acti*. In its Horatian origin,

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<sup>22</sup> Delivered by John of Salisbury. *Metalogicon*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. III, 4: “Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantum umeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre” (Ioannis Saresberiensis. *Metalogicon*. Turnholt: Brepols, 1991. III, 4).

<sup>23</sup> “Victory of art over nature in the race” (Novum organum. The Works of Francis Bacon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin [vol.I for Latin and vol.VIII for English]. 1900. I,117).

the meaning was narrower than that currently attributed to the expression. Horace is describing the idiosyncrasies, generally negative, of the old. The complete expression is *laudator temporis acti / se puero*.<sup>24</sup> “given to praising the years when / he was a boy.”<sup>25</sup>

This formulation is little-known in Spanish-speaking countries, because there is another formulation, well-rooted in Spanish literature, from the medieval poet Jorge Manrique (1440-1479): “*cualquier tiempo pasado fue mejor*”,<sup>26</sup> “every past time was better”. As in the case of Horace, the original sense is more restricted, because the poet speaks of death, of the transience of life, the transience of pleasure.<sup>27</sup> He says namely that, when pleasure is over, its memory is painful, and then *it seems to us* that “every past time was better.”<sup>28</sup> These formulations, both the ancient Latin and the medieval Spanish, allow us to clearly see that they are not referring to pure distance or proximity. What is relevant in both cases is something vital: one’s own experience of life, which includes childhood and old age, pleasure and pain.

The Horatian topos of *laudator temporis acti* is fundamentally negative, indicating displeasure and frustration. More relevant in dealing with time is the ancient notion of authority and what it entails. Due to this notion of *auctoritas*, an ancient heritage that otherwise would have been lost (e.g., literature, history, etc.), was preserved: this was the consciousness of being custodians of a treasure, the transmitters of a heritage. This transmission is *traditio*, delivery, tradition. We can say very synthetically that the beliefs guiding this transmission were the following: the *auctores*, who varied according to subject matter, left clear principles for their respective disciplines, dividing them in a reasonable manner and developing their major subjects. Therefore, the most appropriate way to study a discipline was by striving to achieve a better understanding of the received books, to explain their difficulties and not to contradict them without necessity. If contradiction was necessary, there was always a manner of affirming that, at a more profound level,

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<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Horace. *Ars poetica*, 173. The Latin Library. Fri. 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013. <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml>>.

<sup>25</sup> Transl. A. S. Kline. 2005. Fri. 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013. <[http://poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceArsPoetica.htm#\\_Toc98156244](http://poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceArsPoetica.htm#_Toc98156244)>).

<sup>26</sup> Coplas de don Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre, I. Manrique, Jorge. Cancionero. 3<sup>a</sup> ed. Ed. A. Cortina. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1952, 89.

<sup>27</sup> “(...) quan presto se va el plazer, / como, despues de acordado, / da dolor; / como, a nuestro parescer, / qualquiere tiempo passado / fue mejor”. “(...) Swiftly our pleasures glide away, / Our hearts recall the distant day / With many sighs; / The moments that are speeding fast / We heed not, but the past,—the past, / More highly prize” (Transl. Henry W. Longfellow. *Complete Poetical Works*. 1893. Bartleby.com. Fri. 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013. <<http://www.bartleby.com/356/478.html>>).

<sup>28</sup> “El poeta no afirma, nota unicamente que *–a nuestro parecer–* fue mejor lo pasado” (Cortina, Augusto. “Jorge Manrique. Voz, alma y mbito”. Manrique, Jorge. Cancionero. Cit., XLIX).

this was the real thought of the author.<sup>29</sup> The Horatian expression “*quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*”<sup>30</sup> betrays this reluctance to report an error in an authority.

Insofar as it is a delivery, tradition is a duty of each generation to the next. What will we deliver to our children? What kind of a world economy? What kind of environment? One has to be very insensitive not to be touched by these questions. Therefore, despite the grim image of tradition, an intuition of its profound meaning remains as well as an ambiguous meaning of progress. (There is also a depth to progress and an ambiguity of tradition, but the myth of progress does not facilitate the elaboration of a more balanced vision. At present it is not at all clear that we desire a victory of reason over nature.) Kafka narrates a short story, a recreation of the myth of Babel, which describes the aporetic aspects of the modern notion of progress: the builders of the tower do not do anything, because they know that in the future, people will be able to build better and faster. Why should they try? If the building could be finished in one generation, it would be reasonable to begin in the here and now. Since, instead, the tower will take several centuries, and in the future people will be able to build the tower in six months, and much better, at present all efforts are focused on obtaining the best quarters for the workmen, in defending the prerogatives of the class, and so on.<sup>31</sup> Their faith in progress makes them conservative. This is the death of both tradition and progress.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ebbessen, Sten. “Ancient Scholastic Logic as the Source of Medieval Scholastic Logic”. *The Cambridge History of later Medieval Philosophy*. Ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg. Cambridge – New York – Port Chester – Melbourne – Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 101. About the change of mentality during the Middle Ages, that put the argument of authority in the last place, see Jiménez Cataño, Rafael. “Nosotros, modernos del siglo XII”. *Vuelta*. 240. 1996, 28-31.

<sup>30</sup> *Ars poetica*, 359.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Kafka, Franz. “Das Stadtwappen” (1920). *Die Erzählungen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006, 374-375.

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# SOCIAL CHANGE: HOW 'TRADITION' RENEWS ITSELF THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF DIALOGUE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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*Abstract: This contribution is a theoretical reflection on the social change that is affecting the whole of society. To analyze change, we will discuss the standpoint of several scholars starting with Durkheim, who, in defending "decadence", observes that "common consciousness most likely progresses less than individual consciousness" and that "the collective type is less strong than the individual". Change runs the risk of being considered as "decadence" because it alters the status quo, that is, what we are used to.*

*Keywords: Social change; tradition; Public sphere; generation; decadence/ progress; common consciousness; pammixia; modernization; conformism; democratic politics.*

## Introduction

Although it follows a different pace according to the different historical periods, change is inborn in society. Some 'myths' erroneously surround change: the first is that the future is seen as progress, that is as the repudiation of traditions. The second concerns the conflict between the old and the new with a polarization between the traditional and the modern. Human beings strive to think that an ideal improvement exists between backward and advanced. Every community takes its own 'steps' to make changes and it transforms both 'within', that is with others in its own group, and 'without', that is in the relations with external groups.

Technological progress and political factors, understood as political organization, were the propelling elements of progress in past centuries. Political systems are not simply the expression of the economic organization, given that societies with similar economic organizations can have different political systems. Another important factor is culture, which comes from religion, from communication systems, and from leadership. With regard to political factors, the economic role of the State is essential, because the State is the most important employer in many countries. As to cultural factors, instead, scientific development and secularization are important and connect with the modern ideals of self-realization, freedom, equality and democratic participation<sup>2</sup>.

In this study, we aim to analyze, or, more precisely, to outline the importance of participating in the debates taking place in the so-called 'public sphere', which is an intersection between the different debate spheres already existent in the society,

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<sup>2</sup> Giddens, A. *Fondamenti di Sociologia*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2006: 44-45.

but which includes the dialogue between citizens and, therefore, first-person participation. Consequently, we will start by highlighting how social change may be connected to the direct participation of the individual, who attempts to arouse the collective conscience that ‘takes its force from the society’<sup>3</sup>. It should also be noted that change in society is produced via social forces for which we will use the terminology proposed by Toynbee<sup>4</sup> (1950) who speaks of ‘pammixia’ which he defines as a process of ‘cultural mixing’ and identifies in ancient societies and thereafter. The central topic which needs to be investigated regards the fact that the individuals, as citizens, construct the public sphere by connecting it to the institutional sphere (the Parliament), which is elected in a democratic manner. Even if democracy leads to the free competition between political parties, which tend to win for themselves the positions of power, such participation is not enough because the participation itself is delegated to the representatives. The public sphere is connected to the experience of dialogue, to direct participation, to the citizen’s engagement on topics of current interest.

### **How social is social change?**

The configuration of future societies depends almost entirely on the human actors who, either individually or collectively, act based on their ideals and on their knowledge. A crucial element of that knowledge is to realize the causes of social change, causes which depend on the accurate evaluation of options, of what can and cannot be done. Consequently, sociology of change can significantly affect the directions that change what will follow; and, because of that, this field of research is truly important also from the practical and economic perspective. Through the information supplied by the mass media, the public made up of private citizens focuses on controlling and influencing the running of public interests by the political system<sup>5</sup>. An optimal decision is to maximize the policymaker’s utility, and the same can be said for the collective decision, which is optimal not only for the community but also for its individual members. With his “impossibility theorem” the Nobel Prize for economics Kenneth Arrow showed that Condorcet’s paradox remains unresolved because it is not possible to determine an ‘ideal’ collective decision rule able to “maintain the same conditions of rationality as the individual choices, or rather that can guarantee at once ‘logic coherence’ between individual and collective choices and ‘social equity’ based on the sovereignty of individuals vis-à-vis collective decisions”<sup>6</sup>. The impossibility of finding a solution lies in the fact that preferences are incompatible when voters and number of alternatives are both greater than two.

A first cultural mutation is obtained due to the media which send

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<sup>3</sup> Durkheim, È. *De la division du travail social*, Paris: Alcan, 1893: 183.

<sup>4</sup> Toynbee, A. J. *A Study of History*. London: Oxford University Press. 1934.

<sup>5</sup> Sciolla, L. *Sociologia dei processi culturali*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2007: 204.

<sup>6</sup> Oliverio, A. *Strategie della scelta. Introduzione alla teoria della decisione*. Bari: Laterza, 2007: 73.

“Messages collected over time end up by adding their effects on the personality of the communicators and establish a new balance between them by changing the cultural configurations”<sup>7</sup>.

The persuasive ability of the messages and their emotional functions prove that mass communications are only one of the factors that shape personality by creating widespread psychic affinities, facilitating the flow of expressive messages and current news toward scientific contents.

Language is an element that conditions our view of the world: the flow of impressions is organized in our minds for the most part by the language system. Mass communications are important because they spread information among people, who can thus get to know facts from different perspectives. Culture has a polycentric feature because it draws toward itself several typologies of culture (academic, religious, etc.). Only the strengthening of the intermediate (scholastic) level of communication, by expanding it and renewing its cultural content, can allow the reabsorption of mass culture with its intrinsic disorganization and its vulgarizing trends.

Going back to the question on how social change can be very useful is Durkheim’s observation that underlines the weakness of the common consciousness. He observes that “the common consciousness is likely to progress more slowly than the individual consciousness” and that “the collective type is less strong than the individual”. Consciousness is always composed of many ways of thinking and feeling which are extremely general and indeterminate and which encourage a multiplicity of individual disagreements.

Individualism has undoubtedly reached a high level in modern times, where the cult of the individual has greatly increased: the collective type is too abstract and far from the reality, and subsequently frail: individualism is the successful one. The shift from the collectivity to the individual is generally viewed as decadence which, according to the French thinker, is a phenomenon developing incessantly throughout history:

“The idea that common consciousness runs the risk of disappearing leads to a general and undetermined feeling which leaves room for an ever increasing multiplicity of individual disagreements. Common consciousness – that is, shared by the community – is individual from the perspective of its object”<sup>8 9</sup>.(???)

Within society, the individual is strengthened through solidarity with other individuals and this causes acculturation or transculturation processes, representing a real cultural mixing process. The English historian Toynbee found that

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<sup>7</sup> Braga, G. *La comunicazione sociale*. Torino:ERI, 1974: 148.

<sup>8</sup> Durkheim, E. *De la division du travail social*, Paris: Alcan, 1893: 182.

<sup>9</sup> The quotes in quotation marks of translated texts in Italian, referring to the Italian translation.

“after reaching their apogee, all civilizations have witnessed their culture lose the aspects of a creative minority. A cultural hodgepodge (pammixia) becomes established between the dominating majority and the increasingly vast internal proletariat, whereas increasingly closer cultural exchanges develop with the more backward communities (external proletariat), in such a way that reciprocal contributions are not organically embodied in either culture”<sup>10</sup>.

The pammixia process occurs as intercultural leveling between social classes and as intercultural hybridization between the dominating and the dominated culture. Western Society is undoubtedly undergoing a process of pammixia: suffice it to think of the immigration of disadvantaged groups, of the impossibility to experience artistic avant gardes because of the huge fragmentation of taste, of the sudden technological changes, to the diffusion of the vehicular languages. Toynbee considers that such transformations are signs of decadence and not a possibility of evolution which may be seen only when the changes have been absorbed in a new culture. For Toynbee, the cultural mixing is always understood, at the beginning, as promiscuity and passivity, and only afterwards it evolves in parallel with the growth of a civilization. The social disintegration that equally affects each area of society, from religion to art, to traditions and customs, becomes almost spontaneous. If we consider also the modernity of Pareto’s thinking, according to which groups that hold power coopt the best individuals from the lower classes, and when this ‘circulation of élites’ is interrupted the social balance stagnates and the revolutionary crisis that follows will originate a new élite (however, such a change does not necessarily imply progress). Once it has achieved power, each élite will govern thanks to a combination of strength and cunning, whose balance varies according to what is left of the ruling class. When an aristocracy is in its twilight, ‘foxes’ (i.e. the men that bet on compromise and cunning) prevail, while in modern aristocracies it is ‘lions’ that prevail, i.e. the men characterized by energy and courage.

Modern society is up in arms against routine and tradition. Routine is seen either as an irreplaceable way of learning (Diderot in the Encyclopedia, 1751-1772), or as the killer of the spirit (Adam Smith in the Wealth of Nations, 1776).

Sennett<sup>11</sup> shows that only through repetitiveness it is possible to strive toward creativity, and only by looking at other peoples’ culture it is possible to go toward change, which is not to be seen as ‘assimilation’ – and thus disappearance of one’s own culture – but as something new that blends together the two cultures in varying parts and leaves room for novelty. The scholar sees a crucial value in habit both as regards social practices and self-understanding: we test our alternatives only in relation with the habits that we have already mastered. A life without habits is a life without a meaning. On the other side, Hobsbawn and Ranger<sup>12</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> Toynbee, A. J. *A Study of History*. London: Oxford University Press. 1950: 439.

<sup>11</sup> Sennett, R. *L'uomo flessibile*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010: 34-35.

<sup>12</sup> Hobsbawn, E. J., and Ranger T. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983: 13.

Giddens<sup>13</sup> revisits the term ‘tradition’, which in itself is a continuous search for change linked to its etymological meaning, that is, ‘transmitting’ from one generation to the next, while each generation interprets the world through the eyes of their own times. In human knowledge, there is always a link with what already exists; absolute novelty does not exist and if it did it could not be taken into account. Traditions and customs have existed throughout history, but, Giddens observes, “It is amazing how little interest scholars have in that while we are endlessly discussing modernization and what being modern means”<sup>14</sup>. Interesting is the concept of contemporaneity, seen as the joining link of generations along the diachronic and synchronic course of history and sociology. Zerubavel<sup>15</sup> maintains that the past has to be considered as an integrating part of the identity of the present. Nowadays, the continuity between past and present is jeopardized by the acceleration of social and technological change as well as by economics based on replaceability, that is planned obsolescence (predetermined limitation of the life of consumer goods)<sup>16</sup>. The future, according to these two perspectives, may be viewed as progress or as decay, depending on the idealization of the future or of the past, or of the preservation of the world by reducing waste in the process of degradation. Such a trend, however, has led to a conservative drive (holding on to everything, diverse forms of nostalgia). Nostalgia is felt also for lost or irretrievable times of our past (collective as well as individual). Human beings tend toward a forced linearity of evolution, not toward a ramification; they do not consider the fact that discontinuity is a social invention<sup>17</sup>.

### **The public sphere as the meeting point between individuals and the media**

Habermas speaks of the public sphere as if it were an arena of public debate where issues of public interest can be discussed and opinions formed. The public sphere is born with the newspapers: those who read them discuss in groups and then in public. In principle, the public sphere is made up of individuals that meet as equals in a public space.

“Politics is presented by the media as a show, while private economic interests triumph over public ones. Public opinion is not formed through an open and rational discussion, but rather through control and manipulation”<sup>18</sup>.

With his definition of “public use of reason” Kant inspired Habermas, who maintains that the public sphere is the place where public reason should be used, in other words the social context where citizens can communicate publicly and thus

<sup>13</sup> Giddens, A. *Il mondo che cambia*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2000: 53.

<sup>14</sup> Giddens, A. *Il mondo che cambia*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2000: 54.

<sup>15</sup> Zerubavel, E.. *Mappe del tempo*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> *This observation refers to the ‘single-use’ consumption (Latouche 2013).*

<sup>17</sup> Zerubavel, E.. *Mappe del tempo*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 27.

<sup>18</sup> Giddens, A. *Fondamenti di Sociologia*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2006: 250.

convince or be convinced, or develop new opinions together<sup>19</sup>. The public sphere is no longer the *agora*, the square, but a place within the media where problems and political or moral values are shared.

The public sphere has encouraged the development of public deliberation, which does not take part in the final decision, but rather in the phase where the solution is elaborated.

“Such an intervention is not only a further, more intense moment of democracy than information or consultation, but it also supplies a more complete answer to the need for the extended production of social awareness of the environment”<sup>20</sup>.

This debate goes beyond and leaves behind the issue of defining the ambit of the public sphere, to focus on the ways and articulations of the speeches in the public sphere that tend to consider deliberation as the discussion that comes before a decision on concrete matters.

This introduces the issues of uncertainty and risk at the theoretical level, and in practice focuses on the deliberating models that concern the local administrations. A modern public discussion is mostly a debate in which the media are very important.

Mazzoleni<sup>21</sup> proposes a reinterpretation of the scheme outlined by Habermas<sup>22</sup>. In graphic no. 1, it is visible how the media identify themselves with the public space, thus influencing considerably the relationships developing within. The Public Sphere is positioned in the internal space formed by the overlapping of other three spheres.

Such a schema tends to recognize within the current complex societies the principle of representation of the interests of private autonomy, which is placed alongside people’s sovereignty and public autonomy. Habermas maintains that public spheres operate within three concentric areas: a center, an internal periphery and an external periphery. The center aims to increase power and is the place of the central government apparatus, of administrations, parties, newspapers, and the media. The internal periphery is taken up by expert committees, ombudsmen, foundations, non-profit organizations, and all those institutions that gravitate toward the central power. The external periphery is made up of lobbies, professional and cultural groups, consumers, environmental protection associations. Ideally, the political process goes from the periphery toward the center passing through the internal periphery to get into the political organization.

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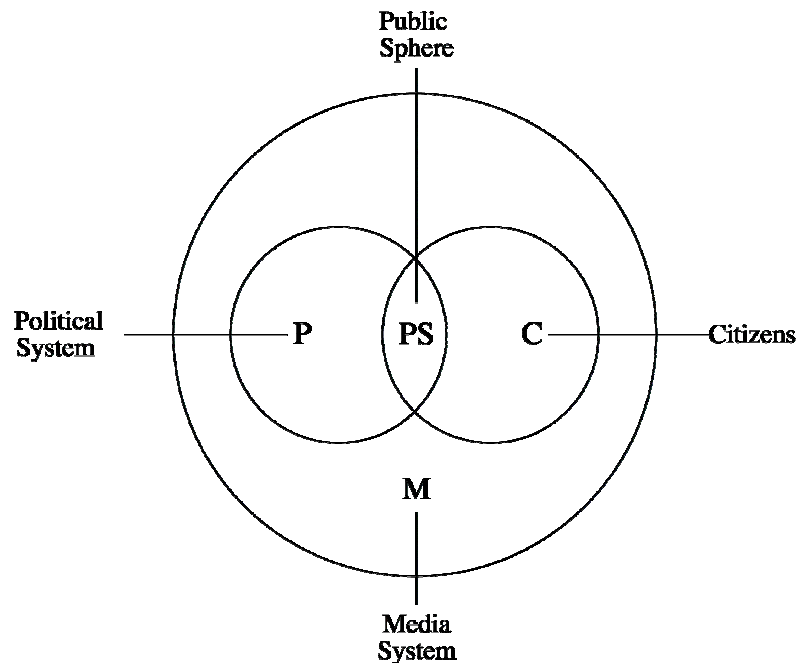
<sup>19</sup> Tonella, G. “Giurie di cittadini e conferenze di consumo. Strumenti di democrazia deliberativa e delle politiche deliberative”. *Foedus* 35 (2013): 13.

<sup>20</sup> Pellizzoni, Luigi, and Osti Giorgio. *Sociologia dell’ambiente*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2003: 283.

<sup>21</sup> Mazzoleni, G. *La comunicazione politica*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2004: 30.

<sup>22</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. Neuwied: H.Luchterhand Verlag, 1962.

Participation in the *'res publica'* is not for everyone and the place where representations are decided is often far away.



Graphic 1

In the European tradition parliaments are central political institutions with a crucial role in the development of democratic societies. No other institution regularly provides a public deliberation space open to discussion so that opposed points of view can be aired and compromise solutions found between political opponents<sup>23</sup>.

### **Opinion as the expression of the individual and the strength of the community**

The art of rhetoric has found a breeding ground in the social studies: speakers have to adapt to their audience and an incompetent audience is ready to be persuaded. In argumentation there must be previous agreement in principle and consideration for shared knowledge and for the possibility to discuss a certain issue together<sup>24</sup> (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1976, 12).

Plato places knowledge devoid of truth or validity at an intermediate level between ignorance and knowledge and since then a distinction has been maintained

<sup>23</sup> Ilie, C. *European Parliaments under Scrutiny: Discourse Strategies and Interaction Practices*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publ. Company, 2010: 11.

<sup>24</sup> Perelman, C. and Olbrechts-Tyteca L. *Trattato dell'argomentazione*. Trans. Carla Schick. Torino: Einaudi, 1976: 12.



between real knowledge (*epistème*) and opinion (*doxa*). Kant observed that holding an opinion is insufficient knowledge, both subjectively and objectively, which is accompanied by consciousness, and Hegel turned opinion into a private 'thing' that cannot be communicated<sup>25</sup>.

From a sociological perspective an opinion corresponds to a set of views that are widespread among the public and which concern current issues. Opinions based on individual's opinions on a given topic are manifestations which consist in an adherence to formulas, of an attitude that can in turn be assessed on an objective scale and can therefore be measured. Thus, public opinion exists when, notwithstanding nuances in attitude, a factor of unity emerges in the repetitions of several individuals. Public opinion can be said to be the dominant feeling in a community and it is referred to only with regard to current issues (environmental issues regarding the pollution, public health, privatization of the water resource, nuclear energy, the law on abortion or on euthanasia and so on).

It is possible that increased individual freedom coincides with increased collective impotence because either the bridges between the public and the private have been demolished or had never been built in the first place. The debate in the public sphere starts from issues of actuality which are contextualized and related to the individual's necessities, this discussion is enormously augmented by the media and broadcasted to a large public especially in the case that it is emotionally moving. The recourse to the agorà, a simultaneously public and private space in which private concerns become significantly connected, allows citizens to seek collectively run instruments that are efficient enough to relieve people of their private misery. This recourse also illustrates people's quest for a space where ideas such as 'public good', 'fair society' and 'shared values' can originate and take shape. The problem is that today there is very little left of the old private-cum-public spaces and new ones capable of replacing them are nowhere to be seen.

Politics typically praises and promotes conformism even if we can achieve it by ourselves and we do not need politics in order to conform. The art of politics, when we speak of democratic politics, means liberating citizens from the limitations that affect their freedom, but it also means self-limitation. And that means making citizens free in order to allow them to establish, individually and collectively, their own individual and collective limitations. The latter aspect is practically ignored and neglected. Individual freedom should be the product of collective engagement (that is, it should be defended and guaranteed only collectively). Nevertheless, today we tend to privatize means to assure, safeguard, and guarantee individual freedom. That however, leads to mass poverty, to unemployment, and to fear. The art of transforming private problems into public issues runs the risk of becoming obsolete and of being forgotten. The way in which private problems are defined makes it very hard for them to concretize into political power.

The important point underlined by the author is that the emancipatory project has not dissolved and, in order to re-launch it, a novel perspective is necessary

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<sup>25</sup> Tessarolo, Mariselda. *Il sistema delle comunicazioni*. Padova: Cleup, 2001: 172.

which consists in bridging as much as possible the gap between the individual *de jure* and the individual *de facto*.

“Today, it is the public sphere that must be protected from the invasion of the private sphere, and this, paradoxically, in order to increase and not reduce individual freedom”<sup>26</sup>.

According to Giddens the expansion of democracy is closely connected with the structural changes affecting society throughout the world:

“Our fleeting and elusive world does not need less government but more government and this can be guaranteed only by the democratic institutions”<sup>27</sup>.

The author understands the community project as the most obvious and predictable response to the fluidity of the social relationships that characterize our liquid modern society. However, Bauman states that the predictability of community response does not remove the vicious circle that generates communitarianism: despite ‘communities’, meeting a stranger is always possible and it is an unavoidable life event, even if communitarianism perceives the stranger/the other as a main danger for the community. Also this aspect of our public life reveals the current deep crisis affecting politics understood as negotiation and reciprocal opposition between individuals<sup>28</sup>.

## Conclusions

Change runs the risk of being seen as ‘decadence’ because it modifies the *status quo*, what we are used to. The trend showed by modern society to accelerate the social and technological change triggers an independent drive toward preserving the community. Social change leads toward the Other, to appreciate them, but at the same time to be different from them and also similar to them; it means implementing what Simmel<sup>29</sup> defines as ‘social differentiation’.

Modernity and tradition strengthen each other (continuous-discontinuous). The new and the old are representations of discontinuity within continuity and vice versa. Tradition and progress have always been two opposing weapons. The idea associated with progress is that “later is better”: the future is better than the past<sup>30</sup>. The view of history in terms of progress begins with the philosophical thinking of the 1700s, and since then history has been seen as a progressive rise from the wild to the civilized stage. However, this optimistic modality of the future is opposed by

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<sup>26</sup> Bauman, Zigmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000: 48.

<sup>27</sup> Giddens, A. *Il mondo che cambia*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2000: 99.

<sup>28</sup> Bauman, Zigmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000: 118.

<sup>29</sup> Simmel, G. *La differenziazione sociale*. Bari: Laterza, 1982.

<sup>30</sup> Zerubavel, E. *Mappe del tempo*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 31.

the modality that makes decline the main issue of memory organization<sup>31</sup>. Hence, the attachment to the good old times<sup>32</sup>. In any case, past and present are not two completely separate entities: “The idea that a time can be identified before which everything is ‘then’ and after which everything is ‘now’ is a delusion”<sup>33</sup>. Koselleck observes that

“history is always something more or something less than what is stated about it and language always does something more or something less than what occurs in real history”<sup>34</sup>.

Change is not a linear movement between an outdated past and a more modern future. The clash between tradition and modernity is another myth, because in actual fact modernity and tradition reinforce each other attraverso un ordine dato dalla struttura sociale della memoria colettiva secondo la quale ci sono eventi memorabili e altri da dimenticare.

When change is concerned, sociology takes as a reference point the individual, understood as the depositary of freedom of choice and opinion, who, in the society of the media and of information, loses his ability of critical analysis and of interaction with other individuals. Human beings, then, should direct their modernization processes toward their own needs without leaving this power in the hands of the so-called experts, who put themselves forward as the depositary of the ability to choose. The experts should not isolate themselves in an ivory tower, but start the discussion in the mediatic public sphere, besides the scientific one, and consequently position themselves as one of the many gatekeepers not only of science in sé, but of its applicability which needs to be evaluated and approved. Everyone should reflect with Luhmann (1985, 202) on the importance of discussion:

“Only by discussing can the complexity of the system be diminished. Through discussion, the individual can diminish complexity by selecting what he considers as relevant” (Tessarolo 2001, 308).

Public sphere and public deliberation can be seen as a reflection on modernity. Movements are the main actors of a democratic public sphere, and democracy *ought to be understood* (is understood) as the ability to provide institutional answers: the promulgation of laws, the holding of referendum, but also the flash mob, which is called for by the debate in the public sphere.

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<sup>31</sup> The 70th anniversary of Russian formalism was celebrated in 2013. Russian formalists believe that literary language is essentially different from any other language because, differently from them, it has no practical function. They think literature is a language whose function is simply *to let us see things through different eyes*, and which manages to do just that thanks to precise stylistic and structural techniques.

<sup>32</sup> Zerubavel, E. *Mappe del tempo*. Falcioni. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 35.

<sup>33</sup> Zerubavel, E. *Mappe del tempo*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 67.

<sup>34</sup> Zerubavel, E. *Mappe del tempo*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 47.

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# THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE ON PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY

Katerina Strani<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: This paper focuses on the impact of socio-political change on the normative model of communicative rationality as the method of public sphere debate. It aims to explore the theoretical implications of the impact of new, diversified publics, institutional complexity and multilingualism, among others, on Habermas's model of communicative rationality. It proposes a reconceptualisation of this model in conditions of overcomplexity and along the lines of a de-transcendentalised, dynamic normativity.*

*Keywords: Habermas; public sphere; argumentation; communicative rationality; social change; normative theory; complexity; intersubjectivity; emergent publics.*

## 1. Introduction

Habermas's theory of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) has been revisited and subsequently revised to account for socio-political change and maintain its relevance as a theoretical standard. Fraser's (1993) work on post-bourgeois, multiple public spheres, Benhabib's on the inclusion of identities, social struggles and power dynamics (1993), McCarthy's objections on the hypostatisation of a historical category to a normative model (1985: 475), Luhmann's on social systems and functionalism (1995) and Foucault's historical materialist objections to universal truths (1984) constitute some examples of scholarly studies that engaged directly with Habermas's work and influenced his own reconceptualisations of his original theory (see Habermas 1984; 1996; 2001). Initially "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1992 [1962]: 27), Habermas's public sphere evolved into "a network for communicating information and points of view [... in which] streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions" (Habermas, 1996: 360). Still, while reconceptualisations of Habermas's model focused on the structure, role, the changing functions and spatiality of the public sphere, its method of communication, that is, communicative rationality, has not been revisited to the same extent. For this reason, this paper explores the impact of socio-political change, not on the public sphere per se, but on communicative rationality as its normative method of debate. In this respect, it argues for an alternative conception of normativity in de-transcendentalised terms that are connected to emergent communication practices.

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## 2. Communicative rationality

Habermas provides a number of definitions of communicative rationality; the following is the most concise:

“There is a peculiar rationality, inherent not in language as such but in the communicative use of linguistic expressions [...]. This *communicative rationality* is expressed in the unifying force of speech oriented toward reaching understanding, which secures for the participating speakers an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, thereby securing at the same time the horizon within which everyone can refer to one and the same objective world” (Habermas, in Cooke, 1998: 315).

Therefore, by definition, communicative rationality is a process rather than a capacity, in which argument is central. It emerges and manifests itself through different forms of debate and argumentation in social interaction. It is this fundamentally *social* form of rationality that enables the creation and development of the public sphere.

Unlike practical reason, Habermas’s communicative rationality is not considered as an inherent capacity of all human beings in a way that its absence would denote irrationality (Habermas, 1996: 3-4). In opting for a conception of rationality that is based on communicative processes of mutual understanding, Habermas does not consider human beings as isolated subjects. Instead, his model suggests for “an intersubjectively shared social world” (1984: 392) where actors are consciously aware that the objective world and their common social world do not coincide and therefore they attempt to “discursively redeem validity claims” (op.cit.: 75) about truth, truthfulness or rightness of norms. In this way, an intersubjective conception of the world leads to intersubjective or “*transsubjective*” (op.cit.: 9) understanding.

Furthermore, Habermas describes communicative rationality as the “consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech” (1984: 10), which means that argumentation is regarded as the medium of this model of rationality, and consensus as its desired result. For this reason, it is also known as “argumentative rationality” (Devetak, 1996: 173). In achieving consensus, argumentation aims at transforming “something collectively problematic into something collectively valid” (Klein, cited in Habermas, 1984: 27). As long as argumentation by way of reflection perpetuates, Habermas argues that we can still learn from our mistakes (op.cit.: 22) and therefore communicate rationally. He claims, therefore, that his consensus-oriented model will still work even if consensus is not reached, as long as critical argumentation is in place.

It is evident that Habermas’s model is overburdened with too many presuppositions from the outset: intersubjectivity, understanding, argumentation and consensus. This results in an overly restrictive concept of rationality, which actually hinders instead of facilitating uninhibited expression and reflective participation in public sphere debate – contrary to Habermas’s aspirations for a

public sphere as “a medium of unrestricted communication” (1996: 308). In other words, communicative rationality implies narrow rationality. It also represents a model of linguistically embodied, “situated” reason (Habermas, 2001: 130) that is neither absolute nor goal-oriented but based on communication and therefore *contingent*. This contingency is significantly heightened if we consider the impact of socio-political change in shared communicative practices.

### 3. The impact of socio-political change

Rapid technological advancement against the backdrop of deepening globalisation has led to the emergence of new publics, new media and new platforms of communication. Communication has become ubiquitous, faster and has acquired global dimensions. Furthermore, socio-political developments increase complexity in public spheres and result in greater diversification of publics and of their deliberation practices. A constant differentiation of publics ultimately leads to opinions becoming segmented and thematised. This results in functional differentiation, with diffuse and polycentric activities involving different delegated institutions of power and control with clearly differentiated but “interdependent” functions (Zolo, cited in Bohman, 1996: 272, n.6). Zolo observes that this marks a shift away from hierarchical structures in a way that, for instance, political campaigns are dependent on media regulations, while the media are subordinated to relevant legislation as well as the advertising market etc. (Zolo, 1992: 5). Such complexity in the form of an increasing fluidity within society (structures, identities, etc.), functional differentiation and diversification of publics poses an enormous challenge to communicative processes in the public sphere.

Habermas did offer an extensive analysis of social complexity and its impact on public deliberative practices (1996; 2006), with a focus on the rise of complex bureaucratic institutions, the influence of money and technological advancement. However, he did not feed this analysis back into his original concept. He proposed a distinction between informal/weaker and formal/stronger publics (1996) but still, this solution addressed the issue of differentiation in the structure of the public sphere but not in communication. In this respect, this paper proposes the distinction between *system publics* and *emergent publics* (cf. Keith, 2013), which emphasises their deliberative character. While emergent publics are becoming increasingly active but also increasingly diffuse, system publics, such as parliaments, succumb to a routinisation of procedures that can seriously undermine the deliberative character of the public sphere in a way that debate would work almost mechanically. In addition to this, the diffuse and largely unregulated character of emergent publics in the public sphere matrix constitutes the lifeblood of its publicness, but it may also expose publics to risks. Smaller and weaker emergent publics may be swallowed by better-organised ones. System publics may be institutionalised and hierarchical, but their opinions and their reasons are institutionally protected, in contrast to those of emergent publics that are increasingly heterarchical in an agonistic public realm.

Lastly, multilingualism against the backdrop of increasingly multicultural and globalised societies leads to multiple competing rationalities in essentially agonistic public spheres. In this way, public spheres become "a field of competing traditions and competing languages" (Alejandro, 1993: 205). If, as examined above, communicative rationality is based on language, what happens when interlocutors use a language different to their native one, or when more than one languages are used in the same public sphere? It becomes even more challenging to determine whether understanding, one of the key parameters of communicative rationality, is truly established and also if agreement, another key parameter, is truly reached "for the same reasons" (Habermas, in Cooke, 1998: 320-1). From this perspective, multilingual debate in public spheres may constitute a case of "pseudo-communication" (Habermas, 1970: 205), where participants do not recognise any communication disturbances unless a third party points them out, and which may in turn lead to "false consensus" (ibid.).<sup>2</sup> A presupposition of universal communicative rationality with emancipatory potential is of no use against this backdrop.

#### **4. Rethinking communicative rationality**

##### **4.1. Power and over complexity**

Socio-political change and the ensuing institutional complexity should not be seen as a threat to the nature of the public sphere as a space of public opinion generation through shared communicative practices. Instead, the task is to conceptualise alternative models of communication in contemporary public spheres, away from the exigencies of consensus and intersubjectivity. Elements such as conflict, power differentials (Honneth, 1991) and overcomplexity (Bohman, 1996) should be incorporated in a theoretical public deliberation model that remains connected to changing communication practices.

In addition to the above considerations of agonistic public spheres with competing rationalities, the role of power in public sphere communication should also be included in communicative rationality in terms of the contingent games of everyday communication (cf. Goffmann, 1981: 38-39 and Lyotard, 1984: 15-17). The study of power struggles, power differentials and their role in Habermas's theory, as well as in communication in general, would offer a more justified and balanced critique of "concrete forms of organisation of economic production and political administration" (Honneth, 1991: 202). In particular, instead of lamenting the nefarious consequences of (systemic, bureaucratic etc.) power on the public sphere, power should be incorporated in a reworked version of communicative rationality. In this respect, critical debate remains a medium of communication,

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<sup>2</sup> The impact of multilingualism on communicative rationality is not going to be analysed extensively in this paper. The implications of multilingualism, such as the need for interpreters in multilingual public spheres or the use of dominant languages by non-native speakers, will constitute the focus of a separate study that will be published in a forthcoming paper on Communicative Rationality and Multilingualism.



however due to the inequality and complexity of the publics, the purpose of debate is to compete for influence in dominant public spheres and formal institutions. ‘Agonistic’ is not considered here as an alternative to ‘deliberative’, but instead it defines the process of deliberation. It is essential for the public sphere to hold some form of internal struggle, because debate and polemic are at its core. By articulating power differentials within the public sphere, its idealising presuppositions will turn into functional preconditions for effective critical debate.

Moreover, managing overcomplexity in contemporary democratic societies is largely the task of system publics in cooperation with administrative institutions (cf. Bohman, 1996). In this intragovernmental context of routinisation of procedures and strategic interests, communicative rationality à la Habermas, based on intersubjectivity and oriented towards consensus, is simply not relevant. Instead, a re-worked version would follow certain principles of practical reason but would neither be centred on reason nor would it hypostatise it as the normative medium or prerequisite of debate.

#### **4.2. Criteria for public deliberation**

Based on the above, this paper proposes the following qualitative criteria for public deliberation: a) Bohman’s (1996: 175) stipulations of political deliberation as *pragmatic, moral and ethical*, but guided by public interest; b) the inclusion of bargaining and negotiating procedures in political debate, as a necessary mechanism of forming balanced opinions and reaching balanced decisions (cf. Saretzki, 2009; c) the requirement of informed debate for purposes of “considered” (Habermas, 2006: 414) public opinion and ultimately informed decision-making.

Firstly, Bohman’s criteria require deliberation to be *pragmatic* in the sense of achieving practical ends, *moral* in the sense of fairness in conflict and *ethical* in terms of cultural values and identities (1996: 175). Certainly, practical ends, morality and ethics can be challenged and adapted in contemporary societies and using them as guidelines for political deliberation may lead to additional confusion. As Outhwaite observes, there are many cases in which people are faced with a pragmatic choice to be made between alternatives, which leads to negotiation and compromise (Outhwaite, 1995: 143) – or bargaining (Habermas, 1996b: 338; Saretzki, 2009). This process would eventually lead to “an accommodation (*Vereinbarung*) which balances out conflicting interests” (Outhwaite, 1995: 143-144). In this respect, fairness should be determined in the framework of what is considered as general public interest and open to scrutiny through different moral codes, publics and law.

Secondly, argumentation is infiltrated with power relations, negotiation procedures of bargaining and arguing (Saretzki, 2009) and specialised discourses. Publics need to be agonistic, they need to question, clarify, justify, contest and challenge opinions and information fed to them by various sources, if social emergence is to be taken seriously. This is not only because of communication uncertainties but also because of the increasing diversity of participants of all forms attempting to mediate public opinion. Instead of presupposing that all participants work towards a common interest (as Habermas suggests), we must instead

presuppose that participants aim at promoting their own (or their groups') private interests. Only in this way can participants truly adopt a critical attitude to debate and communicatively seek the optimal solutions for the promotion of common interests. In this context, understanding is viewed as collective procedure, similar to Habermas's original conception, which is necessary for opinion formation and further argumentation. The process is agonistic – in and between publics, as well as between public and the state.

Of course, Habermas would disagree, as the distinction between bargaining and arguing points to that between strategic and communicative action respectively (see Habermas, 1996: 338). However, in the same way that communicative action may be described as strategic or teleological, if success is defined in terms of understanding or consensus, bargaining may also be described as an alternative form of arguing, not entirely stripped of its normative content. Indeed, instead of claiming that in contemporary societies arguing is progressively swallowed and replaced completely by strategically-oriented bargaining, Habermas emphasises that “discourses and bargaining processes intertwine” (op.cit.: 339) as the main vehicles of deliberation in public spheres. This results in “normatively regulated bargaining processes as a *combination* of rational calculations of success with social norms that contingently steer from behind” (op. cit.: 338). Therefore, the normative element is still present, but it has shifted from governing critical-rational debate to regulating bargaining in the form of negotiation and compromise. This new form of reason, which is “detranscendentalised” (Habermas, 2001: 149) to an even greater degree, is examined in the next section.

Thirdly, public debate needs to be informed and “considered” (Habermas, 2006: 414), in the sense of availability of knowledge in order to treat a specific issue in an informed manner. Functional differentiation in contemporary societies has given rise to more complex issues entering public deliberation. Examples of this include GMOs, stem-cell research, and even religious issues. None of the qualitative criteria for deliberation examined above would be effective in achieving a balanced, fair and constructive debate, if participants do not have sufficient knowledge of respective issues, specialised or not. Again, access to relevant sources of information is key, especially in cases where expert knowledge is vital. The media, NGOs or lobby groups may offer erroneous or ambivalent information to the public in their attempts to guide them towards a particular opinion and ultimately influence will-formation. Moreover, the Internet is in many cases unreliable due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation of its content. Informed debate presupposes that citizens have the critical capacity to distinguish impartial and biased sources of information and knowledge.

The importance of “considered” debate is also raised by Habermas in his discussion of empirical applications of his normative theory (2006). He uses an experimental study by Neblo, which investigated how trial groups learn through deliberation by asking them for opinions on key political issues before and after deliberating on them and reaching collective decisions. The resulting individual opinions were found to be “quite different” (op.cit: 414) from their initial opinions prior to deliberation. According to the study, this change reflected “broader

perspectives” on the issues discussed, as well as “increasing trust expressed in the procedural legitimacy of fair argumentation” (ibid.). Habermas uses the example of similar studies that offer empirical evidence for the learning potential of political deliberation. In short, the argument is that the more we deliberate, the more knowledge we acquire, which lowers the possibility of “polarisation of opinions” (ibid.).

It is important to note that the stipulation of informed debate does not imply that participants who are not adequately informed about a certain issue should be excluded. Instead, it points more to the availability and opportunity given to participants to inform themselves on key socio-political issues so that they can make decisions about ways in which to pressure authority for change. Certainly, awareness of major issues is the duty of responsible citizens, however it is the task of the state, the media, civil society and pressure groups to make knowledge and sources of information available to citizens. Participants who are misinformed or not adequately informed about certain issues could actually benefit from participation in public debate in developing more “considered” (Habermas, 2006: 414) and balanced views, as the above studies have shown. The criterion of informed debate, therefore, is not elitist, as it does not imply the exclusion of participants with limited knowledge or experience. It is more directed to bodies outside the public sphere with the duty of making knowledge available to the public, so that citizens formulate considered opinions and make informed decisions. The requirement therefore is for informed debate, rather than informed citizens.

#### **4.3. Towards a dynamic normativity**

It is evident from the above analysis that the shift in the conceptual role and structure of public sphere deliberation also denotes a shift in the normative core of Habermas’s model. As a rule, normative theory has to do more than be prescriptive. It must not be detached from practical life concerns or from contemporary issues; otherwise it runs the risk of becoming self-referential. Moreover, normative theory does not have to be non-pragmatic and belong to the sphere of the ideal and unrealistic. It should maintain its guiding role without claiming moral or ethical supremacy. The aim is to have norms that do not “possess conclusive validity” (Honneth, 1991: 281), but the role of which is to go beyond the contingent. Habermas himself recognises that “absolute, binding normativity only exists in law, which is both positive and compelling” (1996: 58). Communicative modes of sociation are actually governed by a looser version of normativity, which tracks practice and acquires reflexivity. This type of normativity, advocated here for the status of the reworked version of communicative rationality, does not bestow on its respective theory a meta-status. It is de-transcendentalised and represents a *dynamic* as opposed to static normativity, constantly tested against shifting social practice and not locked in time.

The notion of a dynamic normativity has been advocated by scholars in the fields of social sciences, law and human sciences. It lies between the extremes of positivism and relativism and focuses on the impact of change on values, laws and practices. Social norms are governed by a dynamic instead of static, diachronic normativity, because they are “institutional embodiments of communicatively-produced knowledge” (Honneth, 1991: 259). Furthermore, as Sherry (*forthcoming*) points out, normativity as a social dynamic is “always elusive” in the sense that it is contingent upon social interaction, through which it can be “complicated, modified, reshaped, reinterpreted and reconstructed” (Sherry, *forthcoming*). Similarly, Peschard argues that “the normativity of a cooperative practice can only be a dynamic normativity, generated from within, in response to the elucidation and reformulation of what is at issue” (Peschard, 2007: 151). Conversely, the rigidity of Habermas’s concepts of rationality and the public sphere as a purely normative space threatened by non-normative forces functions as a barrier to free expression, diversity in communication and communication with bodies outside the public sphere.

To avoid the risk of being criticised for utopianism, Habermas opts for the convenience of characterising his ideal model “a methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996: 326). In this way, he points to its normative role and attempts to show that, even though it can never exist under current social conditions, it should function as a guide to existing discursive practices. Besides, he states: “Even under favourable conditions, no complex society could ever correspond to the model of purely communicative social relations” (*ibid.*). Moreover, as noted above, communicative rationality represents a form of “situated” reason (Habermas, 2001: 130), which Habermas nevertheless aims to establish either as the *only* reason or as the *normative* reason. Even though he recognises that public debate is always infiltrated by vested interests and motives, he chooses to privilege communicative rationality in the public sphere. This makes it an empirically questionable “grand narrative” (Lyotard, 1984), which is not even useful as a “methodological fiction” (Habermas, 1996: 326). Instead, dynamic normativity would accommodate the renewed version of communicative rationality advocated in this paper.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has shown that socio-political change in the form of the introduction of new actors, new media and multiple languages results in agonistic public spheres with competing rationalities. The ensuing contingencies, as well as the uncertainty and risk inherent in overcomplex contemporary societies pose significant challenges to the normative role of Habermas's model of communicative rationality. Idealising presuppositions cannot be made in light of such circumstances without risking crossing the fine line between counterfactuality and impracticality. The tension between normativity and empirical relevance requires a reconceptualisation of communicative rationality on the normative level as well as its redefinition on the operational level (cf. Splichal, 2013). Against this backdrop, this paper has a) reconsidered communicative rationality away from the constraints

of consensus and intersubjectivity towards the inclusion of conflict, power dynamics, bargaining and negotiating, pragmatism, overcomplexity and informed debate and b) argued for a de-transcendentalised redefinition of normativity less tied to idealising presuppositions and counterfactuals and more informed by actually existing practices. In the face of challenges such as increasingly multicultural societies with different moral and ethical norms, commercialised societies with changing values and ensuing legal and constitutional modifications to accommodate such radical changes, the purpose and role of this dynamic conception of normativity is all the more evident.

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**MEDITERANEAN AND TRANSATLANTIC ARTIVISM  
COUNTER-ACTING NEO-COLONIALISMS  
IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

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*Abstract: Starting from a geo-political, geo-critical and intermedial reflection on the proliferation of walls and its effects on resident and migrant populations, the essay articulates the proposal of a dialogue shaped by the African American pattern of call-and-response which, by jamming Eurocentric theories / analysis and post-colonial, diasporic, creolized practices/theories/aesthetics, could **hopefully** contribute to a change in the public sphere of cultures touched by the so-called Middle Passage. The dialogue, inspired also by ARTivist thinking and poetics, should be able to envisage a transcultural MediterrAtlantic methodology opening up transcultural no-border wall horizons counter-acting neo-colonial, anti-migratory drives.*

*Keywords: neo-colonialisms; (un)mapping; routes and roots; activism; call-and-response dialogue; diaspora; translation and transculturation; geo-corpo-graphies; MediterrAtlantic dialogue; (un)walling up.*

In light of what was happening in the geo-political, social and cultural sphere along the Mediterranean shores on account of the migratory movements and the European security laws of expulsion and rejection, four years ago I worked out a project embraced by five colleagues titled “Un-walling the Mediterranean: local and transnational practices of transcultural ARTivist poetics and politics of hospitality” that presented intellectual correspondences with and drew inspiration in contemporary works in the areas of geography, geo-politics, cultural studies<sup>2</sup>. The research is focused on the Mediterranean as a *locality*<sup>3</sup> of cultural exchanges, colonizations and imperial enterprises from the Greek-Roman age to the later “Moorish” enterprises and Catholic Crusades; from the Turkish extra-territorial expansionism to the Jewish diasporas in the Reformation Age. From the colonial Middle Passage onwards, the Mediterranean acted both as the crossroad between North Africa, Southern Europe and Asia, but also as the sea route to the Atlantic slave-trade, colonial enterprises and current neo-colonial migratory mobility.

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<sup>2</sup> See, in reference text, for bibliographical details about works by Wendy Brown; Franco Farinelli; Saskia Sassen; **homi bhabha**; Soja and Hopper; Balibar; Mezzadra.

<sup>3</sup> I prefer the word *locality* in the acceptance discussed by Doreen Massey (*Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) because this concept goes beyond the categories of “space” or “place”, which are often saturated by ideas of immobility, stagnation and temporality. *Locality* involves the ideas of connection, interrelationship and entanglement of places/people/cultures/knowledges: in the shifting from space to *locality*, the concept of place is “touched” by the unavoidability of change and movements.

Within this framework, I am presently working on the Transatlantic and Mediterranean writings and arts of migration, diaspora, post-colonization and de-colonization in order to investigate whether and to what extent the creolized border writings and border arts can stand nowadays as alternative political agendas and can enhance knowledge, social justice and *convivencia*<sup>4</sup> beyond/notwithstanding walls and borders. Moreover, as for the theoretical, critical and methodological research group procedures of inquiry into the transatlantic neo-colonial policies and poetics, it must be added that in my case, until 2009, my geo-critical, gyno-critical and transcultural gaze methodology in analysing the concept of the border(lands) and its interrelations to old and new forms of colonialism was greatly indebted to *chicana* theorization and poetics of border crossing and mestizaje (Gloria Anzaldúa), Caribbean poetics of creolization (especially Glissant, Gilroy, Hall) and Cuban and Cuban-inspired concepts of transculturation (Ortiz). But, at this point in Hi/story, my history as a woman who cannot entirely disavow her Mediterranean roots required that my political and intellectual circumnavigation around the narratives of colonialism, post-colonialism, diaspora and neo-colonialisms did not only have to take into account the transatlantic unavoidable facts: “The Colonial, the Postcolonial and the Global are a network. There is no Europe without Africa and the Americas. Issues of colonialism, anti-colonialism, post-coloniality are issues of globalization”<sup>5</sup>, but had also to be concerned with the undeniable evidence that the underlying reasons of today’s mobility from African countries to Europe<sup>6</sup> are to be searched in yesterday colonialist drive to conquest that drove ships from the Mediterranean and North European ports towards the New World, with the atrocious shameful stop in some harbours along the Western African shores to “pick up” human “chattels” to be sold in the most abject markets of South and North America, the new world colonized by “conquerors”.

In the age of the decline of the state sovereignty due to the globalization and empire/imperium of finanscapes<sup>7</sup>, where the capital is the “emerging *global sovereign*” which “links the diverse peoples and cultures of the world, supplanting other forms of association with its own”<sup>8</sup>, in old and new worlds we are witnesses to the construction of one of the oldest forms of spatial demarcation: the walling up of states, apparently to save the frontiers in a world which is at the same time too

<sup>4</sup> A *chicano* expression for a way of living together beyond nationalistic feelings of belonging, close to what Homi Bhabha calls “togetherness-in-difference”, a kind of cosmopolitanism from below, or vernacular cosmopolitanism.

<sup>5</sup> From Giovanna Covi’s ppt. slides for a seminar on Postcolonial Studies held at the University of Bari, December 10-13, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, at a more global level, material and jurisdictional walls have also been erected both between Asia and Europe and along the Ocean surrounding Australia to protect the “sovereignty” of Western Eurocentric countries and continents from the entrance of the colored bodies arriving through liquid routes.

<sup>7</sup>For the concept of finanscapes, see Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books, 2010: 64.



much borderized and yet marked by global processes of cultural mobility. Actually, as Wendy Brown discusses in her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, the walls' function is more a fiction, kind of theatrical stage aimed at giving the citizens an image of power, order and national self-determination challenged by terrorist technologies and neoliberal capitalism<sup>9</sup>. As a matter of fact, this fiction is politically instrumental to expel the over-worn boats carrying the worn out bodies of the asylum seekers. The performance, apparently designed to stage the national sovereignty, to give the residents the feeling of protection from invasion of the other, in the age of national dis-homogeneity and transnational globalization answers the need to be "contained"; and yet, psychologically and culturally, the walls that should assure insiders from vulnerability, engender xenophobic feelings towards the *arrivant*, the diverse and the not belonging (t)here.

In the light of what is happening right here but implicates Europe and North Africa, right now<sup>10</sup>, as a Southern woman and as an americanist scholar with a passion for cultural ethnography who has chosen to apply an undisciplined, interdisciplinary, intercultural and transcultural approach to the study of migration and creolization of cultures/arts/media, I have approached the research issues with some basic questions:

\* Is it possible to work in the field of Transatlantic Studies (that emphasizes the relation between the old world, Europe, and the new world – the Americas – in order to highlight the extent to which the latter was the extension of the former in colonial times), without taking into account, when dealing with post-colonial cultures, the effects of the passage, in the "modern" age, from the Mediterranean sea / cultures / languages / arts / imagination to the Atlantic landings / conquests / cultures / representations / imagination?

\* Is it possible, in order to analyse the negotiations between the two continents in times of globalization and transnational relations, to forget that European and Western history still conceals and silences two of the greatest crimes of America colonization: the abduction, along Mediterranean-Atlantic water routes of bodies, entailing an everlasting uprooting from Africa through the institution of the slave trade, and the policies of segregation and apartheid of both Native Americans and African Americans in the "new world"? This concealment covers up a related historical omission: the harbour from where the slave cargoes departed for the "Black Atlantic"<sup>11</sup>, i.e. for the slave triangulation course, was almost always located along the Mediterranean water routes.

\* How colonization and the institution of slavery still affects contemporary migrations and the European and American immigration restraint/control policies?

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<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> In the conference days, Europe was shocked by the migrant shipwreck at Scicli, in Sicily, on Sept. 30th, and the Lampedusa boat disaster, where more than 300 migrants travelling from North Africa to Southern Europe lost their lives on October, 3.

<sup>11</sup> For the reasons behind the adjectivation of the Atlantic as "Black", see Gilroy, Paul, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London-New York: Verso, 1993.

### **The focus of the survey and the theoretical/methodological approach**

In the attempt to undertake feasible paths leading to the intersection of these issues, I have chosen to bring the focus of the enquiry on the intercultural and transcultural exchange readable/showing up in cultural and artistic product(ion)s originated at/by the confluence of Mediterranean and Transatlantic waters and to adopt a theoretical, critical, comparative, intermedial thinking that enables intellectual workers to look into the present through a methodology aimed at deconstructing the colonial frame that still permeates the interpretation of creolized, decolonizing, inter- and trans-cultural signs and visions, i.e. a method that de-colonizes the reader's/observer's language, eye and thought. These ARTivist (artist and activist), intensely performative works are usually ACTed/performed in alternative, non canonized public spaces and consequently require alternative, non-canonized interpretations<sup>12</sup>.

In a critical inquiry that aims to weigh the impact of art and literary works that are close to or are originated within activist movements that produce sociological and cultural transformations in that they shift their creative impulse from individualism to community bonds (the condition of *convivencia* and togetherness mentioned earlier, but also the new tribalism in "les lieux de sociation" Maffesoli speaks of<sup>13</sup>), I have been applying a theoretical hermeneutical approach which is partly inspired by the African American oral-aural and musical pattern of call-and-response – someone poses a verbal or musical question or unfinished phrase and another subject/player or the band (in music)/a community (in oral exchange), answers back, or can re-launch the call from another perspective. My methodology aims at developing a call-and-response dialogue between Western theories on performativity (Butler), gender, neo-materialism (Barad, Braidotti, Parisi), neo-tribalism (Maffesoli), geo-criticism (Westphal) and post-colonial, diasporic, de-colonizing, and chicano studies that have articulated theories on creolization, mestizaje, transculturality, intersectionality, queerness, diffraction, alternative utopias and archives of sentiments (Spivak, bhabha, Glissant, Anzaldúa, Mesa-Bains, Arteaga, Gilroy, Hall, Brand, Ahmad, Latorre, Lugones, Ortiz, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini, etc.).

The research wants also to test whether the change in the dialogue between new incoming migrants or temporary residents in urban spaces (both in Europe and

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<sup>12</sup> Artivism is a contemporary artistic and activist positionality deriving from the combination of activist social responsibility and commitment to justice (activism) with art creativity. I use this concept mainly in the acceptation worked out by the chicano/chicana border artists and the border-crossing theoreticians who radicalize the concept of aesthetics, creating artistic works with a strong political, community and social impact. On this, see Sandoval, Chela, and Guisela Latorre, "Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color". *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*. Ed. Everett, Anna. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning, 2007: 81-108.

<sup>13</sup> Maffesoli, Michel. *Le temps des tribus, le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés de masse*. Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988. Print.

in North America) and old “national” residents, is readable/observable in the artist works that picture/narrate/represent/re-invent imaginary and yet performable interactions through an entanglement of styles, languages (symbolic domain), practices (political sphere), and theories (critical sphere). Among the results of the research, I expect an answer to the hypothesis that European and Transatlantic theorists could have not conceived new theories, such as neo-materialism or performativity or queer theories, without the contribution of post-post-colonial mestizo/a theorists, artists, activists (and, of course, vice versa, the latter have been able to envisage new styles and poetics also because they were entangled in an often forceful, but sometimes also fruitful dialogue with European and Eurocentric Transatlantic theorizations).

Authors and activists who constitute the texture of the research lead with an intermedial and transcultural approach are: Dionne Brand, Costas Varotsos, Isaac Julien, Jaune Quick-to-see Smith, Faith Ringgold, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Coco Fusco, but in this essay I will only briefly refer to Brand and Quick-to-see Smith. The densely performative artistic works by these people are very often designed to be acted out in alternative, non-canonized public spaces; moreover, very often they sketch maps of interaction and intermediality; in their turn, theories can be dense with poetic, impure, jammed theorizations: we are in presence of a change in the cultural sphere driven by a transmedial, cross-linguistic and transcultural dialogue woven across Mediterranean and Atlantic waters whose liquid element bears, nevertheless, traces of the geo-corpo-graphies of past and present crossers.

### **Call and response between facts and research**

It is a fact that the walling up of states has the political and social function of enclosing the insiders and rejecting the incoming “invaders”, in a word, walls are devised to disconnect worlds, cultures, people. Of course, since facts have an impact on research, in the last decades of the xx century the border and border thinking became a transformative concept since the acts, theories and artworks of *fronterizos y fronterizas* disrupted the Western geo-political function of appropriation and demarcation assigned to boundarization, and gave birth to border crossing theories and poetics that from the transatlantic area spread unto the Mediterranean critical thinking and artworks. But, on account of the European neo-colonial laws of expulsion of migrants and refugees arriving from the African side of Mare Nostrum, unluckily the positive effects of border thinking in the European context has been almost entirely wiped out. It is impossible for the populations in the Mediterranean areas, as well as the inhabitants of the Atlantic side of the Americas, feign they do not see: the material walls erected along the Mexico-US borders, between India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, Israelis and Egypt, Israelis and Palestinian territories, etc., which, in a certain way, re-mediate the ideology behind the construction of walls far away in remote countries in the history of many and different cultures; the technological, virtual walls (radars, infrared technologies) positioned across the Mediterranean to control and reject the arrivals along the Mediterranean coasts in Southern Italy, Spain, Malta, Greece; the

jurisdictional walls promulgated by fortress Europe to keep out of the “national” and “European community” borders the so-called “extra-communitarians”, “illegal aliens”.

The border(lands), that in my geo-criticism had become a central Apulian-Euro-American-*mestiza* core figuration, in my intellectual, emotional and imaginary elaborations is entangled with a human artifact – the wall – that makes mobility almost impossible for Mediterranean *mojados* (chicano word for a crosser), the *harraga* (the burners, those who burn the Mediterranean, the crossers from Africa to Europe): even the liquid element is locked down. So, although maintaining the border and the wall as the central figures/figurations/foundation concept to be deconstructed in the analysis of both nationalistic policies and art discourse, it is my intention to step out of the essentially Anglo-American re-conceptualization of the borders and consequently of the nation-state ideology behind the nation-state obsession for walls and frontiers. By assuming the critical positionality of an intercultural and transcultural mediator/translator, I wish to test the possibility of enacting a dialogue inspired by activist thinking and policies, and by art’s utopian visions and narrations, that can contribute to a change in the public sphere between the three territories/cultures/histories involved in old and new forms of colonialisms: Europe-Africa-the Americas.

The sailing along routes unknown to the canon opened up by the call-and-response dialogue between Western theories on performativity, gender, neo-materialism, entanglement politics, neo-tribalism and post-colonial diaspora studies on *mestizaje*, transculturality, etc., uncovers cartographies that recount another representation of the world and places, as is the case of the cartographies mapping the effects of the slave trade institution in the triangulation Europe-Africa-Americas, with departure in one of the harbours located in the Mediterranean colonialist countries.

### **Brief case study: a contemporary call-and-response dialogue between Black Atlantic diaspora and neo-colonial diasporas**

At the moment I am working to create a comparative and intermedial dialogue between the maps representing imaginary, imagined, and yet real cartographies painted or narrated by descendants of the colonial slave trade in the New World and the maps designed on the bodies and in the poetics of post-colonial African crossers of the Mediterranean. In Black Transatlantic diasporic activist works, the colonialist conception of the map as trustful representation of the borders dividing territories in the name of appropriation and ownership – representation that describes, delimitates, documents<sup>14</sup> –, is disrupted and de-colonized. Theirs are not geo-graphical or geo-logical nationalist maps: the genealogical un-walled geo-corpo-graphies narrated by the African Caribbean Canadian writer Dionne Brand, for example, remind us of what geographers Edward Soja and Barbara Hopper

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<sup>14</sup> De Vecchi, Cristina. *La rappresentazione del paesaggio. Funzione documentaria e riproducibilità tecnica*. Milano: CUEM, 2000: 75.

suggested in *The Spaces That Difference Makes*: “all real geographies are imagined and all imagined geographies are real”<sup>15</sup> (1993: 196). Geocorpographies such as the ones Brand traces in her books offer transcultural and transformative poetical conceptions of space and place in the field of visual and literary representations. These new maps, born out of the interrelation between dis-homogeneous geographical and cultural belonging, design new public, literary and aesthetic *localities*. While bearing traces of the authors’ cultural identities<sup>16</sup>, the diasporic imaginary and yet real maps create an interrelated, multifocal and poly-sensorial texture disrupting the dominant reading of space. In the case of Brand, for example, she directs the reader’s attention on wisps of traces, almost indiscernible imprints and sighs left over by real and imaginary memories and they map new visions of the past kneaded into the present freed from the shoals of silence. By elaborating artistically the concept of imaginary and yet real geographies through an eye-tact-re-memory made up with rags of alter-native documental narrations and knowledge popping up from the depth of genealogical roots that are not dreamt as pure, but as inevitably contaminated, *mestizajed*, creolized, the author stages, call for the necessity of a dialogue.

The “Atlas of emotions”<sup>17</sup> charted by Brand cannot but unavoidably be restive and restless to a conception of the Atlas of the world as incontestable, truthful representation of the earth. Artivistic works such as hers, by conjugating roots and routes, offer to our eyes and minds the representation of the time-lag in a dimension of vernacular cosmopolitanism, and, I would add, a sort of MediterrAtlantic cultural hub<sup>18</sup>, although diasporic authors genetically know what African *harragas* are learning today: the detention camp, the reservation, the wall, the drowning in water, the segregation, the ex-(a)propriation, the rejection.

Positioning herself in what she, as a post-slavery individual knows and senses about racial mixture, Brand in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) disrupts the demarcation and containment intention of western maps:

Paper rarely contains – even its latitudinal and longitudinal lines gesture continuations. Paper does not halt land any more that it can halt thoughts.

... *The best cartographer is only trying to hold water*, to draw approximations of rocks, inclines, bays, depths, plains<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Soja, Edward, and Barbara Hooper. *The Spaces that Difference Makes: Some Notes on Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics*, in M. Keith, S. Pile eds. *Place and the Politics of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1993: 196.

<sup>16</sup> For a geo-critical approach to literature, cfr. Westphal, Bertrand. *Géocritique. Réel, fiction, espace*. Paris, Minuit, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> The expression is taken from the title of an intriguing book by Giuliana Bruno. *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, Film*. New York: Verso, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> In my geo-critical perspective, Africa is the point of conjunction between Europe and the Americas: both African slaves in colonial times and African migrant crossers in neo-colonial age are the populations more deeply touched by the MediterrAtlantic traffic.

<sup>19</sup> Brand, Dionne. *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. New York: Grove Press, 1999: 52

In these days, the best architects of walls in the Mediterranean, are trying to hold water back, to erect a gate in fluidity, to reject those who arrive from the other side.

In her novel, Brand maps the maroons' space: notwithstanding the greater freedom of movement Kamena, an escaped slave on Trinidad island, enjoys respect to detained slaves, he is a "clandestine", confined in a reservation; he is free to wander only if he confines himself in the most unlivable portion of the island. As a matter of fact, he is still enslaved by the wall created by the slavery institution: it is forbidden to leave, to take off back to Africa. He is in a nowhere, in-between America – the not chosen "here" in which his existence and body has been translated – and Africa, the "not here", the other place. In between the here and the not-here, there is the sea.

Also the bodies detained in the Italian CIE (Centre of Identification and Expulsion) camps know that their boundary point is the sea. Betwixt yesterday and today, betwixt colonization and neo-colonialisms, the awakening of the consciousness developed by diasporic, post-colonial (and also post-colonizing) subjects of the unavoidability of establishing a dialogue between subaltern and oppressor, resident and *arrivant*. Betwixt yesterday and today, the intercultural dialogues and culture creolizations theorized in a poetic and political voice by Glissant, Anzaldúa, Ortiz and the border-crossers. Betwixt, the consciousness developed by artists, activists, public intellectuals and scholars that we cannot go on reading ourselves, our cultures, the encounter of cultures in the past and the encounter with humans of everywhere in the present only through the lens offered by Eurocentric tools and theories ("the master's tools" African American feminist poet Audre Lorde speaks about).

In embracing the spirit of the encounter and exchange, of hospitality and wandering, of difference and *convivencia*, we might ask from the *arrivant* to narrate, represent, draw the residents (what in Italy we call "migrant" arte or "migrant" writings) and, at the same time, here, where the Mediterranean waters flow towards Africa when there are the right currents, the residents can set forth African and transatlantic views.

### **Next steps in the MediterrAtlantic dialogue about Un/Walling**

At this stage, in order to develop the geo-critical, geo-political and intellectual actions and topics instrumental to carry on strategies of un/walling the Mediterranean, the research group needs funds in order to create a MediterrAtlantic multi-country joint project, composed by a network of universities, grass-root organizations, NGOs, social networks, scholars, activists, writers, artists, filmmakers, musicians who are already working in the field of interculturality, transculturation, transnationalism, peace, social justice, activism, crossings, resistance to the "walling in" of territories and seas. In this way, it will be possible to establish a supranational and cross-continental dialogue fit to produce changes in the public sphere about social justice and freedom of mobility.

The next issues of theoretical, critical and political enquiry and action on our research agenda are: \*focus on the mental and ideological walls leading to the definition of race, sex, culture and class; \*deconstruction of the sea-wall (in Italian: *mare-muro*) concept as well as of the idea of border/confinement and formulation of new practices working out a new vision of the Mediterranean sea as a porous crossing bridge/free-port so as to foster new reception procedures; \*investigation of the effects that material, geographic and cultural walls separating people and countries have on art and literature in those countries where the research will be carried out; \*Europe(an) new face(s): urban transculturations in condition of vernacular cosmopolitanism; \*displaying, supporting, exporting the counter-action, counter-narration of migration and transculturality called activism in the public spheres of fortress Europe in order to create a public opinion that “rejects” rejection procedures; \*enhancement of processes of transnational and transcultural bridging promoted by translation practice as a counter-action resisting the practices of expulsion of the “strangers” through the policy of building real and legal walls and boundaries; \*Selection of literary and visual works coming from Italy, Spain, Israel, Palestine, the Chicano community, the transatlantic diasporic cultures and the African-Mediterranean region to be translated/screened; \*implementation of an Apulia “no border wall” network in collaboration with anti-racist and anti-rejection groups operating in Apulia, Italy, Palestine, Israel, Tunisia and along Mexican-American borderlands.

The MediterrAtlantic project will actively involve students of each participating institution, women (and women’s associations), activists of the MediterrAtlantic areas, social partners, such as anti-racist and anti-violence and no-border wall organizations, grass-root and mainstream media.

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# CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTIONS: INSIGHTFUL REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT SOCIAL SHIFTS

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*Abstract: This paper focuses on the latest trends in cultural anthropology. In recent years, anthropology has become a socially engaged discipline, grappling with the problems of the new “globalized” world. The paper dialogically engages with some of anthropology’s most recent works, which reflect upon social changes, and ways of being human by examining the intersections of techno-science with administration, neo-liberalism, and governance. It also critically looks at the latest shifts happening in higher education and the decline of the importance of humanities with a focus on the Republic of Macedonia.*

*Keywords: techno-science; governance; crisis of humanities; crisis in education; authenticity; engaged anthropology; humanities.*

## Introduction

Cultural anthropology was brought to a dead-end with the “crisis of representation”, which cast a cloud of darkness over it back in the 80s, when the rising postmodern narratives brought into question all grand narratives. This trend seriously questioned the discipline’s foundational principles of rationality, objectivity, and above all, its western imperialistic roots. Ethnography and ethnographic representation were now seen as projections and/or rewritings of the perspectives of the dominant culture, rather than genuine interpretations of the analyzed culture (Fabian, Clifford, Geertz).<sup>2</sup> However, in recent years, cultural anthropology has recuperated itself from this (almost) self-sabotaging phenomenon and has moved in the direction of a socially engaged discipline.

In order to reemphasize the importance of cultural anthropology today, this paper dialogically engages with a list of some of its most recent works that reflect upon the changes of societies and cultures through an examination of a set of specific phenomena such as the rise of techno-science, administration, governance, and the new system of ethics and values that emerge from these phenomena. These

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<sup>1</sup> South East European University, Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communications, Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford, James. “Introduction: Partial Truths.” *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*. James Clifford & George E. Marcus. Eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986: 1-12. Print.; Clifford, James. “On Ethnographic Surrealism.” *Comparative Study in Society and History*, 23.4 (October 1981): 539-564. Print.; Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Print.; Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1997. Print.

new engaged ways of doing anthropology are used as a reference point to reflect upon the latest shifts happening in higher education and the alarming decline of the importance of humanities. This paper focuses on several aspects of higher education changes in the Republic of Macedonia. Before turning to the new ways of doing anthropology and current issues comprising the corpus of anthropological work, we shall briefly look at the recent crisis of this discipline and its now, newly emerging genres.

### **Crisis of Representation in Postmodern Anthropology**

The postmodern discourse which dominated in the eighties of the last century led to a global crisis in the reception of anthropology and brought into question the relevance of this discipline. The anthropologist was scrutinized and it was uncertain whether ethnographies informed about other cultures, or rather - *wrote a culture*. The crisis of *ethnographic realism* was diagnosed in 1982 with Marcus and Cushman's publication *Ethnographies as texts*, published in 1982 in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. These tectonic changes were to a great extent a result of social processes, both in the discipline itself and also in those societies/cultures addressed by anthropologists in their writings. These processes have mainly been marked by the terms: post-modernization, globalization, and commodification of culture. Postmodern authors were clearly epistemological anti-realists, leaning towards lingual, cultural, as well as cognitive relativism, unlike their critics, who were proponents of the more rationalist, methodological models.<sup>3</sup> In America, this crisis was a consequence of social circumstances, namely, the deconstruction of the paradigms after World War II. The period was marked by a crisis of paradigms and totalizing theories, which lost their legitimacy upon the rise of the fascination with local experiences and reactions, and with the unpredictability of life in general. These circumstances have also influenced the terminology of the social sciences and humanities. The term *post-paradigm* was put to use. It marked the overall distrust in all forms of meta-narration and grand theories, which were challenged by the need to contextualize events and phenomena. The unpredictability of human life was used to question the previous focus on continuity and regularity in the phenomena observed.

One of the key changes that happened to anthropology at this stage was the newly created *crisis of representation*, which resulted from the distrust in the validity of everything described by the key methods of this discipline, first and foremost, ethnography. The problems surrounding the authenticity/subjectivity of interpretation are also tightly related to a debate which arose during the 1980s,

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<sup>3</sup>See more in Salzman, Philip, C. *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory*. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2001. Print. Among other things, he points out that postmodern epistemology, exemplified by the subfields of symbolic and feminist anthropology brings into focus the importance of moral responsibility and the worth of positional relativity and subjectivity, thus challenging the positivist ideal of objective, unbiased perspective.

predominantly with the publication of several works, among which, the edited volume *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus<sup>4</sup> and Clifford's *On Ethnographic Surrealism*.<sup>5</sup> George Marcus, Michale Fischer, Renato Rosaldo, James Clifford, Vincent Crpanzano, etc, are among some of the key figures who are considered responsible for this anthropological shift in the second half of the twentieth century. The importance and meaning of anthropology have been brought into question with these contemporary post-modern dilemmas about the validity of its study. Yet, current engagements of anthropologists are a clear proof that it is a discipline of utmost importance.

In the subsequent part of the discussion we shall look into some of the most recent and deeply socially engaged anthropological works. Among the contemporary anthropological problems so skilfully vivisected by modern anthropology, high on the list are the complex themes of cultural borders, diasporas, education, migration, violence, fluctuation of capital, political fragmentation, social and moral control, neoliberal reforms, new modes of pharmaceutical industry, and information technology. By outlining and at times critically engaging with a few of the contemporary anthropological works, this text aims at stressing the importance of following cautious ways of observing these new rising questions of social change in a globalized world.

### **Contemporary Anthropology – An Engaged Anthropology**

I will open the discussion on contemporary modes of anthropology according to the thinking of Paul Rabinow, an eminent American anthropologist. Rabinow has been quite known for his work in Morocco, which is an example of his deeply personal experience as an anthropologist entwined in the dialectics between being a participant and being an observer. Rabinow's work in Morocco reflects the author's encounter with cultural and linguistic Otherness, and with a society shaped by its colonial past.<sup>6</sup> Recently, he moved into a new realm of research, focusing much of his work on molecular biology and genomics filtered through the lens of bio-politics and bio-security (Agamben, Foucault).<sup>7</sup> The change of research interest marks his dedication to seeking new forms of inquiry for the human sciences. This commitment stems from his belief that the knowledge production practices and institutions are both epistemologically and institutionally inadequate in understanding the human condition in the twenty-first century. He

<sup>4</sup> *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*. Eds. James Clifford & George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Surrealism." *Comparative Study in Society and History*, Oct. 1981: 539-564. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Rabinow, Paul. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1998. Print. Foucault, Michael.

Sennelart, Michel., ed. *Michel Foucault: The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. New York: Pelgrave Macmillan. 2008. Print.

focuses on bioethics, molecular biology, and cutting-edge practices in life sciences and security, to call on for a new, collaborative approach among scholars that would produce new insights in the human sciences.<sup>8</sup> Rabinow argues that anthropology should be the practice of studying the forms that the mutually related aspects of knowledge, thought and care gain through the continuously shifting relations of power. He is deeply engaged with the theories of Foucault, Deleuze, Dewey and embarks upon the investigation of the forms the *anthropos* is being given today.<sup>9</sup> What worries him is the absence of a *logos*, of a rationality and an ontology, of a form of knowledge and a way of understanding the *anthropos*, that is, the man of today. The most distinctive innovation of the *anthropos*, according to Rabinow lies in the realm of technological developments, that is, genome mapping and bioethics. A genome is the sum of an organism's hereditary information and the new modes of genome sequencing are means of violation of the individual and the collective identity.<sup>10</sup>

The concerns with human rights, the new forms of being human or *anthropos* and the mechanisms of sciences and biotechnologies changing the meaning of life are further discussed by many other anthropologists. A breakthrough study is Kushik Sunder Rajan's *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic* (2006).<sup>11</sup> This, being a major theoretical and anthropological contribution to science studies and political economy, at the same time is also a major contribution to the studies of social mechanisms, redefining life through a new set of discourses, practices and strategies emerging from life sciences. As such, it stands as a prominent study of the social and medical interpretations of truth and violence, as previously discussed by Das. Grounding his analysis in a multi-sited ethnography of genomic research and an analysis of drug development marketplaces in the United States and India, Kaushik Sunder Rajan argues that contemporary biotechnologies such as genomics can only be understood in relation to the economic markets where they emerge. Sunder Rajan conducted fieldwork in biotechnology labs in the United States and India over a five-year period, from 1999 to 2004. Through his multi-sited research with scientists, venture capitalists and policymakers, he compares drug development in the two countries, examining the goals of research, its financing mechanisms, government regulations, and the hype surrounding these new technologies.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Rabinow has been a leading figure in designing the Anthropology of Contemporary Research Collaboratory Organization (ARC). See more on this organization at <http://www.anthropos-lab.net>

<sup>9</sup> Rabinow, Paul. "Midst Anthropology's Problems." *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problem*. Aihwa Ong & Stephen Collier. Eds. Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 40-55. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Rabinow, Paul. "Midst Anthropology's Problems." *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problem*. Aihwa Ong & Stephen Collier. Eds. Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 45. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Rajan, Kushik, S. *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

The beginning of the biotechnology industry according to Rajan can be traced back to the seventies and eighties. The new techno-science was a recombinant DNA technology (RDT), a set of techniques for cutting up and joining together DNA molecules in the lab. The RDT was followed by the rise of biotechnology companies, which in turn led to further research in the life sciences and biotechnology. Rajan argues that capitalism and life sciences are coproduced, but also puts forward the disturbing point that life sciences are *overdetermined* by the capitalist political economic structures within which they emerge. So, for instance, while labs can exchange DNA information for free, there exists an increased protection of such information as private property, both among corporate biologists as well as scientists in academia. He suggests that this could be due to the fact that the academic scientists are actually or potentially corporate entrepreneurs. This risk can be a consequence of the life sciences entering the domain of corporations. Therefore, universities employing these scientists seek to protect their intellectual property as a corporation would. Rajan delivers a lucid study of the merging of biotechnology and market forces, and consequently, of life sciences as producers of new economic values, thus introducing the metamorphosis of *life into* capital. He takes on a challenging analysis of the changes to the concepts such as “life”, “capital”, “fact”, “exchange”, and “value”. Genomics is taken to be one of the main instigators of this change, but it also reflects other, more general changes in two broad domains. The first one is in life sciences, which are becoming *information* sciences. The second one lies in the fact that capitalism is today acknowledged as the economic form, which dominates over alternative economic formations, characteristic of socialism and communism. Therefore, by combining the two, Rajan argues that life sciences represent a new phase of capitalism, and consequently, biotechnology is a form of enterprise inextricable from contemporary capitalism. Life becomes a calculable market unit, structuring the terrain on which biotech and drug development companies operate and violate life. Apparently, much of recent anthropological works question ethics in science, or the lack of it thereof, and of sciences turning into enterprises directly coming out of the logic of capitalism.

There is a clear distrust in the ethics of science and the influence of new technologies in other contemporary anthropological writings as well. These writings are based on ethnographies of various countries in relation to the global market economy as a major trigger of social shifts. To name one example, Janer Roitman's article on the bandits and traffickers in the Chad Basin, who would by most standards be labeled as violators of certain rules, reveals similar grievances regarding the power of the international market and the local reactions to it, through various forms of banditry.<sup>12</sup> Here again, the question of how to live is posed in relation to technology and biopolitics. Roitman talks of the “garrison-

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<sup>12</sup> Roitman, Janet. “The Garrison-Entrepôt: A Mode of Governing in the Chad Basin.” *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problem*. Aihwa Ong & Stephen Collier. Eds. Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 417-437. Print.

entrepot” (those who cut off the roads) characterized by a range of unregulated activities including smuggling of hardware, electronics, dry goods as well as petrol, vehicles, and ivory black market trading. The marginalization of African economy has led to new forms of economic integration. Banditry emerges as a regime of living that actively reshapes existing forms of regulations, governments and ethics. Yet, Roitman wonders how much this new political subject created in reaction to the forces of modern liberalism and bureaucratization can really destabilize the sovereign.

### **The University and Life in Crisis**

It becomes clear from the discussion above that the question of how to live, in an era of market economy and commodification of things that previously had no monetary value, is a vibrant theme in current anthropological research. This question is also often posed by anthropologists in relation to the rising emergence and strengthening of technology, hard sciences and bio-politics. In this sense Ong and Collier point to the new anthropological problems marked as “domains in which forms and values of individual and collective existence are problematized or at stake in the sense that they are subject to technological, political and ethical reflections and interventions.”<sup>13</sup> This emerging phenomenon of technologies and sciences as central factors of reshaping of life, of turning it into a calculable market unit, of detaching ethics from science and merging it strictly with the enterprise interests, bring to the forefront alarming questions such as “what it means being human today?” The power of market economy logic in shaping the way we live is nowhere more visible than in the latest tectonic moves that shook higher education.

In his interview for Truthout, Henry A. Giroux states that neoliberalism as a mode of governance is detrimental for higher education and the students. It is a mode of governing which according to him “produces identities, subjects, and ways of life free of government regulations, driven by a survival of the fittest ethic, grounded in the idea of the free, possessive individual.”<sup>14</sup> He notes that although higher education may be one of the few public spheres left where knowledge, values and learning should offer a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing public values and critical hope, the reality of things greatly differs. He sharply observes that “too many universities are now wedded to producing would-be hedge fund managers, depoliticized students, and creating modes of education

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<sup>13</sup> Ong, Aihwa & Collier, Stephen. “Global Assemblages: Anthropological Problems.” *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problem*. Aihwa Ong & Stephen Collier. Eds. Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 3-22. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Polychroniou, C. J. “*The Violence of Neoliberalism and the Attack on Higher Education*.” *Truthdig*, 27. May 2013. Web. 06. Nov. 2013. <[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the\\_violence\\_of\\_neoliberalism\\_and\\_the\\_attack\\_on\\_higher\\_education\\_20130327](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_violence_of_neoliberalism_and_the_attack_on_higher_education_20130327)>

that promote a “technically trained docility”.<sup>15</sup> The fields of humanities and social sciences are facing decline as well. As Hutner observes “U.K. universities have faced steep funding cuts leading, for example, to the closure of Middlesex University’s philosophy department; and just this year Canada’s University of Alberta suspended admission to 20 humanities programs”<sup>16</sup> These disciplines are the ones which grapple with the question of human existence and of critical thinking about what it means to be human. Therefore, their disappearance from the curricula is highly symptomatic and brings us close to the above-mentioned anthropological concerns about life turning into commodity and science becoming devoid of ethics.

A vivid example of the deterioration of higher education and the humanities can be explained by the following examples taken from the higher education changes in the Republic of Macedonia. The Law on Higher Education in Macedonia from 2008 declares “freedom and autonomy of research and applicability of international standards of quality in science”. At the same time it is open to competition and equal opportunities for everyone. Yet, the Law as a pillar of higher education contains articles (43 and 51), which define the criterion for reelection of staff, and providing financial support for a research project. The main criterion for these items is the publication in “impact factor journals.” The data bases that fulfill this criterion are Emerald, Scopus and Thomson Reuters. Publishing houses such as SAGE, Palgrave MacMillan, Columbia University Press etc. are not part of this data base and as such are very lowly ranked if at all on the point scale for reelection and promotion of staff. Moreover, the journals of Routledge, Oxford University Press, and other renown publishing houses are not in the list of impact factor journals, whose impact is dubious to begin with as it measures the frequency of citation within the data base. To this end, in November 2007, the European Association of scientific editors (EASE) has issued a recommendation regarding the impact factor journals, stating that it should be used only and cautiously for the measurement of the impact of the whole journal and not of the individual work. They recommend that journal impact factors should not “be used for the assessment of single papers, and certainly not for the assessment of researchers or research programs, either directly or as a surrogate”.<sup>17</sup>

The German foundation of sciences has issued a similar warning, to which the Macedonian Ministry of Education has uncritically responded, without taking any of these alarming recommendations into account. Metze points to the manipulation of impact factors and urges us that the “system instabilities, such as excessive self-cites and ‘title suppressions’, are currently evident and will probably

<sup>15</sup> Polychroniou, C. J. “The Violence of Neoliberalism and the Attack on Higher Education.” Truthdig, 27. May 2013. Web. 06. Nov. 2013. <[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the\\_violence\\_of\\_neoliberalism\\_and\\_the\\_attack\\_on\\_higher\\_education\\_20130327](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_violence_of_neoliberalism_and_the_attack_on_higher_education_20130327)>

<sup>16</sup> Hutner, Gordon. “The Real Humanities Crisis is Happening at Public Universities.” *New Republic*, 06. Sept. 2013. Web. 06. Nov. 2013. <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114616/public-universities-hurt-humanities-crisis>>

<sup>17</sup> European Association of Scientific Editors statement on impact factors. Web. 06. Nov. 2013. <[http://www.ease.org.uk/sites/default/files/ease\\_statement\\_ifs\\_final.pdf](http://www.ease.org.uk/sites/default/files/ease_statement_ifs_final.pdf)>



increase in the future.”<sup>18</sup> The work of the university professor is reduced to the number of publications in impact factor journals, which additionally leave very little space for humanities and social sciences. Moreover, professional advancement and dedication to academic research among the professors is strictly quantified by calculating the number of their publications in what are often bogus journals that do not undergo any peer reviews. The publication of a monography and not of journals, has always been considered the highest point of one’s academic maturity in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

Following is the case regarding rules on promotion at South East European University (SEEU), Tetovo in the Republic of Macedonia. In the document regarding the rules on promotion, 10 points can be assigned for research articles published in an International Journal with impact factor indexed by EC Thomson Reuters. Monographies are awarded from 1 to 5 points maximum, only if they underwent a rigorous peer review process, and book chapters if published by an international publisher, can receive up to 5 points maximum, but would mainly be awarded 2 or 3 points. The state and the University give financial awards to those publishing in an impact factor journal. This clearly shows an immense lack of awareness regarding the above-mentioned warnings and manipulations of impact factor journals. An engaged work by Kolozova scrutinizing the Law on Higher Education, evidences a number of extremely important recommendations amongst which is training of academic staff engaged in the committees for election, reelection and promotion of lecturers into respective academic titles. Furthermore, it calls for the decentralization of higher education whereby academics would reclaim the decision-making capacity and autonomy of introducing criteria for promotion in academic titles. Moreover, she calls on the removal of those articles within the Law on Higher Education, which emphasize the publication in impact factor journals as a prerequisite for academic progress. Likewise, Kolozova reiterates the need of realizing the significance of humanities within a society, as a mode of critical and reflexive thinking about what it means to be human.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper tackled several domains: anthropology, biotechnology, ethics, and education. It first looked at the so-called *crisis of representation* in anthropology, which has questioned ethnography, criticizing it as a practice, and proposing that it can be under deep influence of the subjectivity and cultural conventions of the ethnographer. The importance and meaning of anthropology

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<sup>18</sup> Metze, Konradin. “Bureaucrats, Researchers, Editors, and the Impact Factor - A Vicious Circle That is Detrimental to Science.” *Clinics*, 65.10 (2010): 937–940. Web. 06. Nov. 2013.

[http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2972600/#b12-cln\\_65p937](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2972600/#b12-cln_65p937)

<sup>19</sup> Kolozova, Katerina “International Academic Standards According to the Laws on Science and Higher Education in Republic of Macedonia.” *A Study of Social Sciences in Macedonia: Trands, Challenges and Reccomendations for Policy Improvement*. Slavica Indzevska & Aleksandra Dimova, M. eds. Skopje: OSI-Macedonia, 2012:142-146. Print.

have been brought into question with the contemporary post-modern dilemmas about the validity of its study. Yet, the contemporary engagements of anthropologists discussed in this paper are clear proof that anthropology is a discipline of utmost importance in terms of detecting the content of contemporary social changes in a globalized world ruled by the logic of market economy. This has been illustrated by several examples of vivid and bold engagement of anthropology with contemporary problems, raising the question about what it means to be a human today. The current corpus of anthropological themes ranges from cultural borders to diasporas, migration, violence, fluctuation of capital, political fragmentation, regimes of social and moral control, neoliberal reforms, to the new modes of pharmaceutical industry, and information technology. All these themes are approached systematically and competently by contemporary anthropologists (Ong and Collier, Rabinow). From some of the anthropological ethnographies mentioned earlier, it is evident that anthropologists today do not approach the process of globalisation in a similar fashion as other social scientists. Instead of looking at globalization through the lens of grand narrations announcing the new world order, or through the analytical lens, which studies more the versatility of “local” reactions and resistance to global forces, these anthropologists analyse the specific phenomena through which these changes emerge. Among these phenomena, there is techno-science, systems of administration and/or control (biopolitics), as well as ethical and value regimes underpinning life. These phenomena are, according to Ong and Collier, *global* in the sense of being mobile and dynamic, moving and reconstructing society, culture, and economy. Yet, these global phenomena articulate themselves in specific situations. Ong and Collier refer to them as *global assemblages*.<sup>20</sup>

These ethnographies of the contemporary were then discussed in line with the recent transformation in higher education and applied to the case of Macedonia, which can be helpful in diagnosing not only the crisis in education, but in the overall concept of what it means to be *anthropos* today. The uncritical accentuation of impact factor journals - an area greatly submitted to manipulation, the universities which produce an unpoliticized corpus of students ready for the labor market, but unprepared to critically grasp questions of what it means to be human today, are alarming. Engaged, collaborative, multifaceted ethnographies are a must if we are to come up with institutional recommendations that will trigger changes in the area of education as the core of society. The decentralization of higher education and the restoration of the lost autonomy of the academia (especially of the humanities and social sciences) is a crucial step towards critically engaging with these alarming issues. It is a step that should encourage us to fight against the realistic and overtly pessimistic vision of Muhić who states that we live in a world where the revolted man (L’homme Revolte) became the tamed man (L’homme Aprivoise) for the benefit of many and the loss of all humanity.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ong, Aihwa & Collier, Stephen. “Global Assemblages: Anthropological Problems.” *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problem*. Aihwa Ong & Stephen Collier. Eds. Blackwell Publishing, 2004: 4. Print.

<sup>21</sup> Muhić Ferid. *Domination and Revolution*. Skopje: Az-Buki, 2005: 280. Print.

# **‘SUPERDIVERSE’ SCHOOL POPULATIONS IN SOUTHERN EUROPE: REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE USE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR LEARNING STRATEGIES**

**Stefania Scaglione and Sandro Caruana<sup>22</sup>**

***Abstract:** MERIDIUM is an EU-funded Lifelong Learning Project, which involved primary schools in six countries in Southern Europe: Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Malta. In this paper we present some results of this project, and we put forward suggestions in order to adopt strategies in language teaching which may suit the language use and needs of increasingly diverse students’ populations, favouring interlinguistic and intercultural awareness. Such an issue is particularly relevant in Southern Europe, where a “homoglottic habitus” often hinders educational systems from building on the multi- and plurilingual potential of families and social contexts which pupils live in.*

***Keywords:** Migration; Primary schools; Language teaching; Interlinguistic awareness; Multilingualism; Cultural diversity; Superdiversity; Intercultural awareness; Plurilingual and intercultural education; Integration*

## **1. Introduction**

International migration towards Southern European countries has undoubtedly led to major social changes in these contexts during the last decades, due to its huge dimensions and considerable growth rate<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, unlike many States in North-Western Europe, Southern European countries have only recently become an immigration destination. In fact, until the 1970s a number of these States generally experienced significant mass migration to other European countries or to other continents.

Due to such a sudden inversion of the migratory trend, as well as to the ethnic, religious and cultural “super-diverse” features of immigrant communities (Vertovec, 2007)<sup>24</sup>, in Southern European countries public discourse on immigration is traditionally characterized by alarmist tones that amplify any

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<sup>23</sup> According to estimates by the United Nations Population Division (UNDP), over the last two decades the percentage of the immigrant population in Southern European countries has risen from 2.9% to 9.5%, compared to the current 10.8% in Northern Europe and 12.4% in Western Europe.

<sup>24</sup> Vertovec, Steven. “Super-diversity and its implications”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, Issue 6, 2007: 1024-1054. Print.

problems related to this state of affairs, leaving little room for reflection on how integration could be better understood (EUMC 2005).<sup>25</sup>

Immigration is often blatantly branded as a problem, especially in media discourse (EUMC 2002).<sup>26</sup> Even institutional discourse about immigration and cultural diversity is not free from bias. It is therefore particularly interesting to analyse what happens within educational contexts, where increasingly diverse school populations inevitably must lead to reflections both on the challenges and on assets related to multicultural societies.

Plurilingualism and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration represent an everyday experience for pupils, and it is at school that they have to be taught to appreciate the value and potentiality of them. On the contrary, in the absence of an institutional discourse which legitimises and favours a progressive detachment from the *monolingual habitus*<sup>27</sup> (Gogolin, 1994), as well as from traditional *homoglotic ideologies*<sup>28</sup> (Lüdi, 2011) of many educational institutions, there is the risk that these individual and collective linguistic resources remain largely extraneous to the school community or are regarded as limitations to overcome, while only European languages of wider communication taught at school are credited with status and prestige. Very often, in fact, bilingual and/or multilingual programmes in schools are equated to the study of English while other languages, which may be extensively present in social contexts of Southern European countries, are almost totally excluded. This situation seems even more incongruous, if we take into consideration that an increasing number of children who speak many different languages join these educational institutions every year.

## 2. Research questions

In this paper, we will focus on the educational policies and settings of six Southern-European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Malta and Romania), discussing data gathered through MERIDIUM, a EU-funded Life Long Learning project<sup>29</sup> conducted from 2009 to 2011. On the basis of the above, the research questions to be discussed in this paper are summarized as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). *Majorities' Attitudes Towards Minorities: Key Findings from the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey*. Wien: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2005. Print.

<sup>26</sup> European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). *Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media*. Wien: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2002. Print.

<sup>27</sup> Gogolin, Ingrid. *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule*. Münster: Waxmann, 1994. Print.

<sup>28</sup> Lüdi, Georges. "Quale integrazione per i parlanti delle lingue di immigrazione?". In: Giannini, Stefania and Scaglione, Stefania (eds.). *Lingue e diritti umani*. Rome: Carocci, 2011: 81-113. Print.

<sup>29</sup> LifeLong Learning Program (LLL), key-action 2 (Languages), project number 143513-LLP-1-2008-1-IT-KA2-KA2NW.

1. At a macro-level: in these Southern European countries do official policy documents promote cultural diversity at school and do they explicitly call the attention of teachers to plurilingualism and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration? And if so, to what extent does this occur?
2. At a micro-level: are plurilingualism and linguistic diversity present extensively in today's schools, explicitly brought to the attention of pupils in everyday classroom activities and eventually exploited in order to create a learning environment which fosters interlinguistic and intercultural awareness?

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Official policy documents on plurilingualism and linguistic diversity

As far as the first research question is concerned, we have noticed, in the first place, that in the last few years these countries have made significant progress in adopting structural measures aimed at supporting the plurilingual growth of the young generations: as Eurydice reports (EACEA-Eurydice, 2008; 2009; Eurydice 2004; Eurydice-EUROSTAT 2012) clearly demonstrate, foreign language teaching has been introduced from the very early grades of schooling and methodologies such as CLIL are adopted by a growing number of schools.<sup>30</sup>

However, a more careful assessment of the language policies and measures taken in these countries leads to the conclusion that the exhortations of the European institutions in favour of pluri- and multilingualism have been transposed, by and large, according to a pragmatic and instrumental vision, which focuses on the formally certified acquisition of foreign languages with economic and professional marketability. The result of this is mainly an increase in the offer of English courses, as stated earlier. Moreover, although in some of these countries policy documents do include intercultural dialogue among the general objectives of school curricula and envisage specific measures for the integration of children whose L1 is different from the official language of instruction, generally they just vaguely mention, if ever, the need to support the languages and cultures of origin of immigrants. Moreover they substantially ignore the Council of Europe guidelines for the development of policies and curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education (CoE, 2007; Beacco et al., 2010).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> EACEA-Eurydice. *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*. Bruxelles: EACEA, 2008. Web. 14 Nov. 2013 <<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/>>; ---. *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe*. Bruxelles: EACEA, 2009. Web. 14 Nov. 2013 <<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/>>; Eurydice. *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe*. Bruxelles: Eurydice, 2004. Web. 14 Nov. 2013 <<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/>>; Eurydice-EUROSTAT. *Key Data on Education in Europe 2012*. Bruxelles: EACEA, 2012. Web. 14 Nov. 2013. <<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/>>.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe. 2007. *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, 2007. Web. 14 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.coe.int/t/>>

On the basis of the evidence gathered within the MERIDIUM project, we can report that this state of affairs holds true both in traditionally monolingual countries, such as Italy, and in countries where bilingualism is official at state or regional level: Malta (state level); Spain, Slovenia and Romania (regional level). Only Portugal seems to be an exception, with *ad hoc* measures to foster the maintenance of immigrant languages.

### 3.2 Plurilingualism and linguistic diversity in schools

In order to get a better picture of everyday school practice (micro-level), MERIDIUM researchers have investigated 57 primary schools, located in areas specifically chosen in each one of the six MERIDIUM countries because of the presence of a large number of children with foreign background in the school population. In the case of Romania areas where children had a direct or indirect migratory experience were considered. The research, carried out in the school-year 2009/10, involved school directors as well as 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, pupils (10 year-olds) and their parents, as shown in Tab. 1:

Table 1

SURVEY COUNTRY	N OF PUPILS	N OF PUPILS WITH FOREIGN BACKGROUND <sup>32</sup>	N OF PARENTS	N OF FOREIGN-BORN PARENTS
<b>Italy</b>	697	242	613	186
<b>Spain</b>	429	122	284	70
<b>Portugal</b>	316	115	316	88
<b>Malta</b>	164	43	164	33
<b>Slovenia</b>	156	52	137	25
<b>Romania</b>	305	37	292	97
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2067</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>1806</b>	<b>499</b>

School directors and teachers were interviewed, while pupils and parents were given questionnaires to fill in. In the first place, it must be observed that no schools, among those involved in the research, kept any database or archive concerning languages spoken by pupils and no teachers took any systematic measure in order to collect information on language biographies of pupils and their families, with the exception of newly-arrived children of immigrant origin. Such a lack of attention for the linguistic background of pupils is already particularly significant, as it means that the linguistic resources of the school population are

dg4/linguistic/; Beacco Jean-Claude et al. *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural Education*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, 2010. Web. 14 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/>>.

<sup>32</sup> As far as Romanian informants are concerned, numbers refer to subjects with direct migratory experience.

“invisibilised” from the outset, particularly as far as so-called “second generation” immigrant pupils are concerned.

Linguistic repertoires and language use of pupils were therefore investigated by means of the MERIDIUM questionnaire, in order to assess from a qualitative and a quantitative point of view the linguistic diversity among the school population involved in the research. To this end, we distinguished between the use of “autochthonous languages”, namely those languages which have a historical presence in the geographical area where data were collected and of “allochthonous languages”, namely those which do not have a historical presence or tradition in the states that we included in our research.

In the first place, the use of allochthonous languages has been investigated within the family context here, 445 subjects out of 1,984 who gave valid answers (22.4% of the sample) use allochthonous languages with their parents. The use of these languages alternates frequently with autochthonous ones (243 cases), but in the case of 202 subjects allochthonous languages are exclusively used. Within each national sub-sample, the most extensive use of allochthonous languages was registered in Italy (33.1%), followed by Portugal and Spain (19.1%), Romania (14.7%), Malta (14.6%) and Slovenia (12.5%).

The use of these allochthonous languages is obviously more widespread among children who are born outside of the country from where data were collected (foreign-born) in comparison with that registered among children born ‘locally’ (native-born); however, even in the case of this group, the percentages registered cannot be ignored as they tally to 15% of the valid responses.

Children’s language use was investigated within the school domain, both from the point of view of ‘institutional’ interactions with their teachers, and from that of personal relationships with their classmates. If we consider the pupils whose responses we analysed above, as far as language use at home is concerned (1,984 subjects), we observe that 1.8% (36 cases) and 1.5% (27 cases) of them state that they use allochthonous languages (i.e. languages that are different from those taught at school) with their classmates and with their teachers respectively.<sup>33</sup>

The clear picture that emerges here is that schools only seem to encourage students to conform to the countries’ official (mainly monolingual) language use, anything but encouraging plurilingualism. What, therefore, is not working? The following are some critical issues, which emerge from the interviews held with teachers: first of all, teachers rarely encourage activities based on the presentation of the “languages of the class/school”, even if these activities could be carried out quite easily by taking advantage of the reading and writing skills which many pupils with foreign background possess and by involving foreign-born parents.

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, the possibility of having two or more children in the same class who potentially could use the same allochthonous language to communicate varies according to the state in which data were collected: while this possibility is frequent in Italy (29 classes out of 36) and Slovenia (5 out of 6), it is much less frequent in Romania (7 out of 13), and more so in Spain (8 out of 21), Portugal (6 out of 17) and Malta (4 out of 10). Nonetheless, in each one of the countries involved in the research the tendency to *shift* towards the language of schooling is very clear, also when interacting with classmates.

Secondly, didactic activities directed toward the stimulation of metalinguistic reflection by means of languages other than those included in the curriculum are very rare: in fact, forms of cooperative learning exploiting the linguistic resources of pupils with a foreign background were not registered in the schools under study. This difficulty is particularly pronounced as there is a lack of practical teaching materials which encourage the use of different languages and which foster linguistic and cultural diversity. Thirdly, there is an emphasis, by ‘immigration-receiving’ countries, on the fact that migrants are to gain competence in the country’s official language/s. While acknowledging the importance of the above, such an outlook may narrow the teachers’ perspective, as they encourage these students solely to acquire the language used in schools.

In most cases, all of these aspects are related to a diffuse lack of in-service training for teachers, who generally do not possess an adequate theoretical preparation to deal with linguistic diversity from a psycho- and sociolinguistic point of view. Besides seriously prejudicing the efficacy of their teaching strategies, this lack of adequate preparation may perpetuate negative attitudes and convictions about bilingualism and/or multilingualism (e.g. that an allochthonous pupil may be hindered by his/her L1 while learning the L2).

The super-diversity that characterises school population is therefore concealed in everyday activities, with two main consequences: increasing negative perceptions (and self-perceptions) towards alloglossia (the so-called “deficit theory”) and favouring a “schizophrenic” and partial approach towards intercultural education: schools promote the knowledge of “other cultures”, but it ignores the linguistic aspects of them.

Moreover, the two negative aspects outlined above are transmitted as implicit messages not only to children, but also to their families, thereby legitimising, in adults, any prejudices and reservations towards linguistic diversity. The considerations raised above clearly warrant the need for activities serving to assist teachers to confront themselves with the linguistic diversity of pupils and to learn how to exploit it as a resource to improve their teaching practice both from an affective and a methodological point of view.

#### **4. Initiatives to promote awareness about plurilingualism and linguistic diversity**

##### **4.1. The MERIDIUM booklet: *Babel and languages***

With the aim to give teachers some concrete suggestions on how to promote awareness about plurilingualism and linguistic diversity among pupils, MERIDIUM researchers have created a booklet (*Babel and languages*) conceived as a tool to stimulate children’s curiosity on language diversity around them.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>34</sup> The booklet is available on the official MERIDIUM website: <<http://meridium.unistrapg.it/>>.



booklet is designed as a sort of travel diary written by an alien, Babel, landing on Earth from his planet Multilingua, where languages of the universe are studied in order to communicate with the inhabitants of other planets. Babel relates what he has learned during his trip, writing in six languages (the ones examined by the MERIDIUM project: Italian, English, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovenian and Spanish); he also asks pupils to help him in order to collect new information. The text is composed of six sections, concerning respectively linguistic diversity in the world; individual bilingualism; official vs. non-official languages and collective bilingualism; language families; writing systems and language learning.

The sequence of arguments is organised on the basis of increasing complexity and aims to create a discourse-space where plurilingualism and linguistic diversity are “naturalized” at a discourse level, that is represented as “normal” and taken for granted, and not conceived - as usually happens in Southern-European counties - either as a by-product of migration, or as an extraordinary phenomenon. Through the materials pupils are encouraged to talk about their experiences and feelings concerning the languages they speak and hear around them, reflecting on the socializing function of languages. They are also called to reflect consciously on the way in which they learn a language, focusing on the different language abilities, on transfer phenomena, lexical cognates etc. Occasions are offered to observe and compare the structure of different languages, starting from those which are spoken within the classroom.

Each section begins with information about a specific language-related topic and is completed, on the next page, by three simple exercises. On these grounds, teachers may further elaborate the topic and organise students’ work, depending on the composition of the classroom and on the experiences and interests of the pupils. The booklet has been evaluated positively not only by the European Commission, but also by teachers and school directors who took part in some seminars organized by the partner universities of MERIDIUM in their respective countries<sup>35</sup>; in many cases, further initiatives have arisen, in order to design complete teaching modules. In particular, we will account for a 20-hour training course for primary and lower-secondary school teachers held during the school-year 2011/12 by the research unit of the University for Foreigners of Perugia, Italy.

#### **4.2. “MERIDIUM experimentation” in Italian primary schools**

Assuming as a starting point the booklet *Babel and languages*, researchers and teachers have collaborated in order to plan six teaching modules concerning plurilingualism and linguistic diversity. These modules have been subsequently tested in 12 classes of 7 primary (5<sup>th</sup> grade) and lower-secondary (6<sup>th</sup> grade) schools (10 to 12 year-old children), where a 25-hour slot on the class schedule had been reserved to the “MERIDIUM experimentation”. It is worth noting that both

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<sup>35</sup> Cfr. Čok, Lucija, and Zadel, Maja. *Slovenska Istra med politico sožitja in priseljeništvom / Slovenian Istria between coexistence policy and immigration*. Koper: Univerzitetna Založba Annales. 2012. Print.

Italian language and literature teachers and foreign language teachers took part in this experimentation.

Although limitations of space render it impossible to provide a detailed report of the activities carried out in each school, it suffices to say that pupils, parents and teachers welcomed the initiative with interest and participated actively in it: they were also eager to enrich the learning contents by accounting for their own personal experiences. The extracts quoted below are drawn from the “MERIDIUM register” of a fifth grade teacher after the end of the project. The class where this teacher works is composed of 19 pupils: 10 of them (8 foreign-born and 2 born in Italy) have foreign-born parents, representing 7 different nationalities, while 9 pupils were born in Italy from Italian parents:

«Children have spontaneously inferred that bilingualism is an asset. At this age, they are perfectly capable of understanding its importance, and they feel admiration for a class mate who can speak, read and write in two languages. They also became aware of the fact that knowing a language means much more than simply attending curricular classes of a foreign or second language. [...]

Conclusions which pupils have come to at the end of the project reveal a deep enrichment, not so much on the cognitive side, as on the emotional side, especially for children who can speak two languages and who sometimes, during their schooling, experience difficulties. Becoming aware of their ability to do something that others are not able to do, such as speaking two languages, has increased their self-confidence. On the other hand, this project has provided children born in Italy from foreign-born parents the occasion to better appreciate the value of the different cultures with which they are in contact.»

The following are some of the remarks made by pupils:

- «Thanks to this project, I understood the meaning of “bilingual”. “Bilingual” means that a child can speak more than one language, and I am one of them, as I can speak two languages: Italian and Romanian.» (Iulian, born in Romania of Romanian parents, arrived in Italy in 2004)
- «This project has allowed me to discover that, in the school I attend, bilingual children are more numerous than children who speak just one language.» (Filippo, born in Italy of Italian parents)
- «Thanks to this project, I have discovered languages I did not know and I found out that all languages are valuable.» (Leonardo, born in Italy of Italian parents)

These few remarks are but an example of the positive feedback received, which shows that this MERIDIUM didactic activity was indeed useful in a multilingual classroom, such as the one we have taken as an example. Feedback indicates that teachers have found a new way to discuss bilingualism and multilingualism, without being somehow “forced” to frame it within the discourse about “immigrant children’s problems”. Moreover, in a vast number of cases they proved capable of overcoming their fear to show their “ignorance” about the languages spoken by the pupils: they assumed a more open stance towards the possibility of learning from children and integrating their own knowledge by using web-resources. Children of bilingual families, and the families themselves, clearly

perceived their languages of origin as resources and assets, regardless of whether or not they are used within the schooling context. They were proud to show how similar (Romanian) or different (Chinese) their language of origin is compared to Italian, and have become aware that their language knowledge, far from being an obstacle, can be exploited as a tool for learning Italian as well as other languages. Monolingual national children gained awareness, not only of the unimagined abilities of their “foreign” classmates, but also of their own abilities to speak, understand and reflect on foreign languages and Italian dialects. Moreover, they learned several interesting facts about important international languages (e.g. Arabic) that in Italy are viewed with suspicion and sometimes even looked down upon.

Before we formulate our conclusions, a clarification is in order: this MERIDIUM didactic experimentation was not intended to be an alternative to other more systematic educational approaches fostering language awareness and bilingualism that have been successfully promoted and implemented by European organizations and academic institutions over the years (e.g. CARAP, CLIL). On the contrary, one of the goals of our research was to inquire whether these approaches were known, and possibly assumed as models, by teachers. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and we may safely say that, in spite of the resources available on the Internet, school personnel is still largely not aware of the proposals put forth by the Council of Europe concerning plurilingual and intercultural education. This happens because central educational authorities have publicized insufficiently, if ever, these initiatives, and because scarce resources have been devoted to in-service teacher training. However, one must admit that, beyond these factors, a role is also played by an ideological background, largely shared by the society at large, geared to assimilate immigrant children as quickly as possible and conceiving of the school system as the instrument of assimilation *par excellence* even though it may dismiss their language and culture of origin.

## 5. Conclusion

Before adopting plurilingual and intercultural education as a practice in schools, its core values - equal opportunities for all, social cohesion, enhancement of individual linguistic and intercultural resources - have to be incorporated in everyday discourse practices, uncovering and recognizing the linguistic and cultural background of pupils and, in so doing, “de-naturalizing” the (assimilationist) assumption that at school pupils have to “function” in one and the same language (the language of instruction). Such a goal can be obviously reached by means of various strategies, and the MERIDIUM project has been a worthy occasion to become aware of other initiatives which have been taken in MERIDIUM countries by other researchers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Amongst these, it is worth mentioning a project conducted by Antoinette Camilleri Grima in a Maltese school: see Camilleri Grima, Antoinette. “Fostering Plurilingualism and Intercultural Competence: Affective and Cognitive Dimensions”. In: Caruana, Sandro;

Dissemination of MERIDIUM results has been met favourably both in local schools and in the wider community. During the discussions held as part of the dissemination it emerged clearly that educators view schools and classrooms as places which offer opportunities to students with different backgrounds to reflect on linguistic and cultural diversity. The presence of foreign students is considered to be enriching, despite the challenges it creates. Although the body of research in the field has increased recently, head-teachers, teachers and school staff still complain about the lack of practical resources necessary to address students' needs, especially when faced with newcomers who start attending school throughout the course of the year and with students who have difficulty understanding the language of schooling. A question which features regularly is whether didactic tools are readily available for the needs of today's multicultural classrooms. Such queries clearly spell out the urgency of devising educational policies and teaching materials which address these needs and take into consideration practical experiences in different settings (as outlined in Kenner and Hickey, 2008) and an "adjusted" curriculum (Olshtain and Nissim-Amitai, 2004).<sup>37</sup>

In conclusion, the results show that, in the six countries involved in the MERIDIUM Project, at present, educational institutions seem to dismiss the issue of linguistic diversity brought about by migration: they are often silent about it, as if language were not a fundamental component of culture, or an indispensable instrument for living and learning.

Within society at large, on the other hand, the strong relation between intercultural education and plurilingual education is not sufficiently perceived, and, especially in countries such as Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Malta, it is not unusual to hear people affirming that "allowing" immigrants and their children to maintain their languages could hinder their integration or that the languages "of others" are not "our business". The fact remains that the enthusiasm and promptness with which schoolchildren, in particular, participated in the educational initiatives referred to in this paper, irrespective of their nationality, is an undeniable indication of their eagerness to express themselves and their willingness to learn more about languages. In this sense, it becomes obvious that understanding more fully linguistic diversity and multiculturalism in schools is indeed necessary in order to address issues that are encountered in these institutions in Southern Europe today, thereby moving towards more inclusive systems which are vital to create reflection, acceptance and involvement while putting aside prejudice and fear.

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Coposescu, Liliana; Scaglione, Stefania (eds.). *Migration, Multilingualism and Schooling in Southern Europe*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013: 74-94. Print.

<sup>37</sup> Kenner, Charmian, and Hickey, Tina. (eds.). *Multilingual Europe: diversity and learning*, Staffordshire: Trentham Books Limited, 2008. Print; Olshtain, Elite., and Nissim-Amitai, Frieda. "Curriculum decision-making in a multilingual context". *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1/1, 2004: 53-64. Print.

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# LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Angela Soltan<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of language education policies in the context of the Moldovan society transition from 1991 towards new political and cultural models. The research emphasizes the necessity to develop a demand-based, communicative approach to learning languages, favouring a framework for dialogue and intercultural communication skills development.*

*Keywords: language teaching effectiveness; relevant knowledge; intangible capital; intercultural communication skills.*

## Introduction

The language teaching is an intrinsic part of mainstream education.<sup>2</sup> Its objectives and strategies are implicitly linked to the directions taken by the society. The language can reflect two aspects of human nature: cognitive and social interaction. As social interaction the language has to satisfy two conditions: to make understood the actual content and to negotiate and maintain the relationship with other person.<sup>3</sup> What kind of language knowledge do we need to allow us to satisfy both conditions and be able to interact in a complex manner? How the education system can be aligned to these practical needs of human interaction while teaching languages?

Through our research we attempted to answer these questions. This paper introduces the results of the research covering the effectiveness of the language education and describes problematics of language teaching in secondary public education. The study was organized to include the quantitative analysis of the perceptions and attitudes of general population from one side and qualitative analysis of the attitudes of students, teachers and policy makers from another side.

The first part of the research discusses the Moldovan as well as the larger European region context and examines how languages might shape skills and prepare pupils to learn, discover and build social relations. The second part is focused on the hypothesis of the research, questioning the validity of objectives in language teaching established by education policy makers. Special emphasis is put on communication needs across local, European and global levels. The third part

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<sup>2</sup> Ó Riagáin, Padraig. The Consequences of Demographic Trends for Language Learning and Diversity. Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education. Reference Study. Linguistics Institute of Ireland, Language Policy Division, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002. Print, p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Pinker, Steven. "What our language habits reveal." Ted.com, Jul. 2005. Web. 25 Jul. 2013.

describes the applied methodology with emphasis on the quantitative and qualitative studies we have conducted and on the findings of the research, which allowed us to provide preliminary conclusions and recommendations for education policy makers and implementers.

### **Country context: Eastern traditions and western aspirations**

Languages became more than just a secondary school subject in the ‘globalized’ world, characterized by the expansion and redesigning of international economic relations and the flows of goods, services, labour and capital.<sup>4</sup> During the last two decades of transition of the Moldovan society, learning languages and improving communication skills became gradually part of a complex career project for Moldovans who struggle to be professionally successful and economically wealthy despite the fragile democracy and weak economy. The new education strategy proposed for public discussions by the Ministry of Education in September 2013 put an emphasis on studying foreign languages and the official language as part of universally useful knowledge and skills that should be prioritized in the new curricula along with entrepreneurship, communication skills, team work and problem solving skills.

The new strategy is approaching the education issue as a flexible process based on three pillars: accessibility, relevance and quality. The knowledge and competencies acquired by students after going through this process should be adaptable to various contexts.<sup>5</sup> The new strategy intends to shape out the knowledge and skills that researchers and experts in economy define as ‘intangibles’. Intangibles emerged as a field in the 1990’s, stimulated by information technology and marked a significant shift in the world economy and business.<sup>6</sup>

An impactful line of thinking in the field of economy is that knowledge has value when it becomes ‘applied wisdom’, sufficiently relevant for problem solving. “Real knowledge is revealed when it is transformed into wisdom. It is this kind of knowledge that creates revolutionary changes both personally and professionally”.<sup>7</sup> The biggest challenge Moldovan education system faces is how to increase the language education efficiency in order to make this knowledge relevant and contribute to building the intangible capital.

The Moldovan education system aspires to be aligned to the today world of information technology where the knowledge is the key source of competitive

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<sup>4</sup> Ó Riagáin, Pdraig. The Consequences of Demographic Trends for Language Learning and Diversity. Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education. Reference Study. Linguistics Institute of Ireland, Language Policy Division, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002. Print, p. 23

<sup>5</sup> “We wanted to show to the society why do we need to change things in the system.” Interview with Maia Sandu, Minister of Education. Radio Free Europe, 25 Sept. 2013, Web. 26 Sept. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> “Defining Intangible Capital.” Smarter-Companies, Inc., n.d. Web. 24 Sept. 2013

<sup>7</sup> Deragon, Jay. “Knowledge Is Cheap, Wisdom Is Priceless.” The Relationship Economy, Inc., 03 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

advantage. Language knowledge materialized into cognitive, communication and social interaction skills bring a valuable contribution to the chain of the intangible capital, which accounts for 80% of corporate value (Fig. 1).

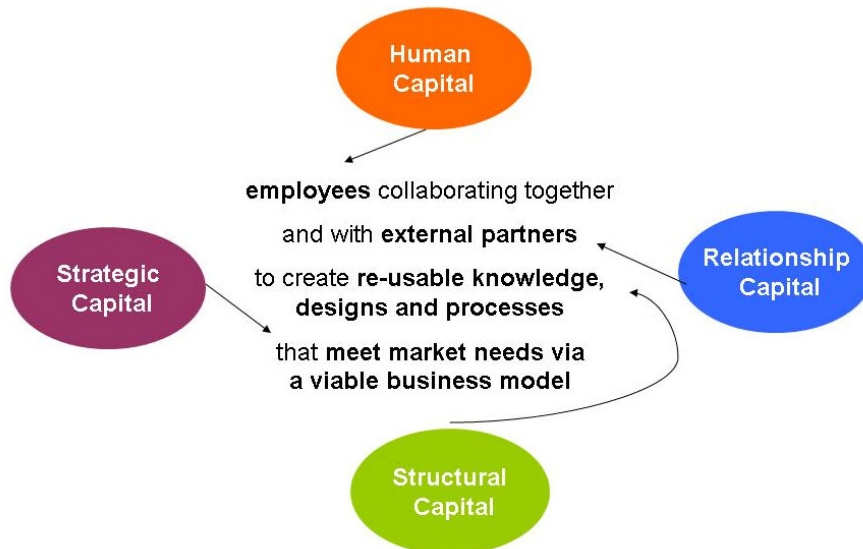


Fig. 1 - Intangible capital.<sup>8</sup>

The new education strategy mentions that, during last decades the Republic of Moldova made significant efforts to align to the European standards and requirements in terms of education. Unfortunately, this process has been done without adjusting the contents accordingly. As the Moldovan society is still imprinted with ideals and clichés inherited from the soviet ideologies, the teaching of languages bears the weight of this socio-political background. The education system of that period did not stimulate initiatives to entail any qualitative change. The traditional school used to instil in students' minds 'ready to use' cultural and linguistic clichés, stuffed with metaphors.

The post-soviet states entered a world where the widespread presence of cable networks, satellite systems, multinational corporations and computers homogenized cultures and allowed a virtual or real contact among them. The young generations are the most exposed to the flows of information and knowledge. The access to Internet make the contact with other languages incredibly easy compared with just a generation ago. This process opens up new possibilities of relationship between cultures, building up new communication patterns and generating new career opportunities. The question is whether the Moldovan public education framework is aware of it and willing to turn it into advantage, facilitating the process of language acquisition? For many years, Moldova has been going through a transition period fluctuating between Eastern traditions and Western aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Defining Intangible Capital." Smarter-Companies, Inc., n.d. Web. 24 Sept. 2013

<sup>9</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" In *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.72, No. 3, 1993: p. 22-49. Print.



As a result, the education policy is fluctuating between updated strategies and insufficient capacity to implement them.

The education system approached the education process from the perspective of 'what to teach' instead of 'how to teach'. After the independence of Moldova, the education system has been entrusted with the role of contributing to the reconstruction of social relations, building up through language education a new basis for social cohesion between the minorities and the majority.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of the '90s, the relationship between the majority and the minorities in Moldova entered a new phase, not based on a common ideology anymore. The majority language, called Moldovan in the Constitution and official documents and Romanian by the Academia and public education, was declared official language. Russian was declared the language of interethnic communication. The education system had to help with the transition from Russian to the official language in the public life. This meant teaching the official language both to the majority, which used their native language only in colloquial situations and to the minorities, which used Russian as the language of communication.

Another challenge for the Moldovan society in transition was to find a place in the post-soviet geopolitical and economic configuration. In this respect the education system had to revise the existing models of teaching foreign languages in line with the new objectives. In the last two decades Moldova has experienced significant migration outflows both to the East and to the West. Occurring initially as a result of the social unrest, it was later triggered by the economic situation. These migration outflows, in addition to natural causes resulted in a dramatic population decrease. The demographic trends and migration flows called for a Government action on language policy and increasing efficiency of the language education. An impactful line of thinking in this respect is that informed and well-educated people will not necessarily stream to where the capital is; they will have more skills and capacities to make capital flow to where people are.<sup>11</sup>

### **The research hypothesis**

The inefficiency of the language teaching in the secondary education in Moldova is related to an excessive focus on the output rather than the outcome. Reshaping the language education process by focusing particularly on the communication needs will increase the efficiency and speed up the processes of aligning the language education to the requirements of the 'globalized' world adapted to the local context. In other words, while the level of knowledge acquired in secondary school is abundant, it cannot be transformed into a practical, 'applied wisdom' yet. In this perspective, we are questioning the effectiveness of teaching

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<sup>10</sup> Petruți, Doru, et al. *Ethnobarometer in the Republic of Moldova*. Institute for Public Policy, Trans. Ștefan Rusu et al. Chișinău: Gunivas, 2006. Print

<sup>11</sup> Ó Riagáin, Pádraig. *The Consequences of Demographic Trends for Language Learning and Diversity. Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education. Reference Study. Linguistics Institute of Ireland, Language Policy Division, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2002. Print, p.22

languages in the secondary education in the Republic of Moldova with particular reference to the communication needs of beneficiaries.

## **Methodology**

Through this study the authors tried to reach a better understanding of language education in the Moldovan public education system. The study combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods and covered the period 23 October – 22 November 2012. The quantitative method was based on a survey. A representative sample was calculated using the probability sampling method. A stratified multi-stage random sampling included 1415 people aged 15-64. The study covered 95 randomly selected localities; the households were selected based on sampling interval. The sample was representative with an error of  $\pm 2.6\%$ . The qualitative method was based on interviews with key informants and two focus groups discussions with university students.<sup>12</sup> The study included a comprehensive desk review of available information on languages dynamics, teaching and their role in the Moldovan public space. The review included main trends in the past 20 years, analysed the existing national policies and priorities, and outlined the dominant ideologies.

## **Discussion on findings**

### *Quantitative research*

The questionnaire assessed personal attitudes towards the efficiency of the teaching processes within the Moldovan educational system regarding languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova (official language and minorities' languages) as well as foreign languages. We highlighted some specific questions that assessed the activities aimed at developing language competences and proficiency and also the questions that assessed the usefulness and relevance of languages the way they were taught in secondary education.

In Moldova, there are five local languages studied at school. Romanian and Russian were already taught before the independence. Ukrainian, Gagauz and Bulgarian were introduced in the secondary education programmes in the '90. There is no clear local language regionalization in Moldova, except Gagauz being taught exclusively in autonomous region Gagauzia. Bulgarian and Ukrainian are primarily taught in Bulgarian and Ukrainian villages.

The respondents had to read the proposed options and select what activities were used in the study of languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova. The majority of respondents (92.5%) mentioned that studying local languages at school was based mainly on grammar rules. At the same time, other activities included in the curricula (e.g. audio, video, real life conversations etc.) were less present in language classes. (Fig.2)

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<sup>12</sup> Dörnyei, Zoltán. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics. Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford: Applied Linguistics, 2007. Print

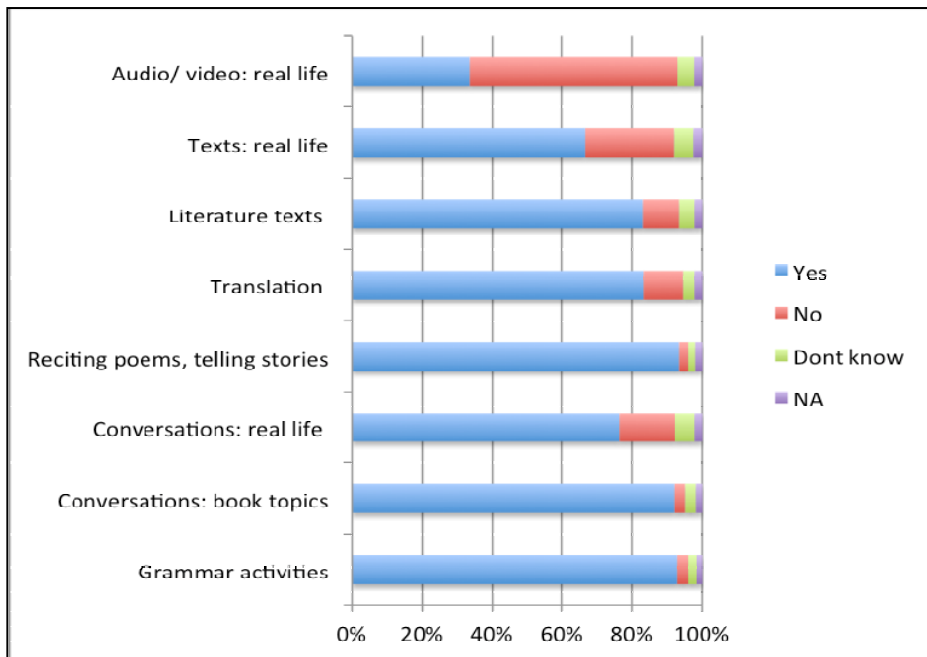


Fig. 2 - Teaching activities for local languages

Similarly, 88.3% of respondents remembered grammar rules as the main activities in studying foreign languages. Audio and video materials, as well as authentic texts were mentioned as teaching activities in average by 30% (Fig.3). At the same time, the answers generally indicated that the teaching activities are diversified, even if grammar holds a leading position.

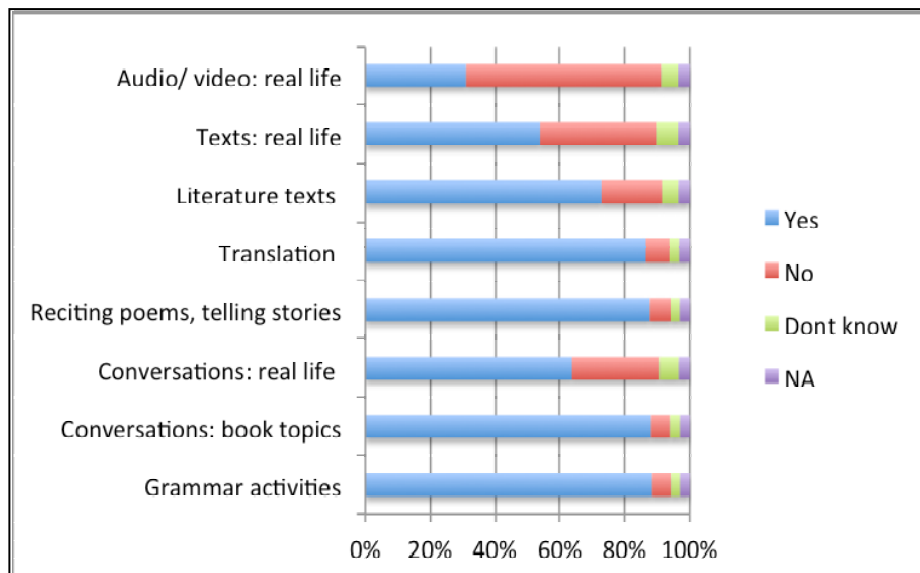


Fig. 3 - Teaching activities for foreign languages

The respondents had to select the language or languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova and the foreign languages they have studied in the secondary education to rate the usefulness for their further activity of what they had learned. The study revealed a high degree of irrelevance of the knowledge of language acquired in the secondary education for all local languages, except Russian, which was the main language of communication before the independence of Moldova. (Fig. 4)

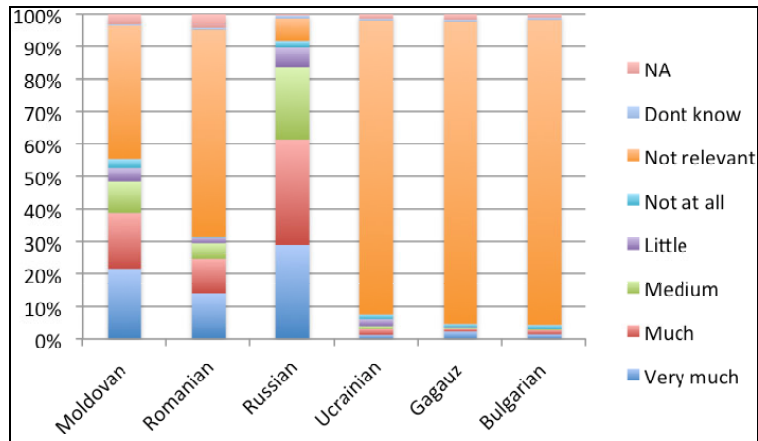


Fig. 4 - Relevance of the knowledge acquired in the secondary public education for the local languages

Similarly, the study revealed a low relevance of knowledge acquired in foreign language classes for the respondents' further activities. The higher relevance of the French language is mainly explained by the fact that about 70% of schools in the secondary education, can propose only the French language as the first foreign language to be studied. (Fig.5)

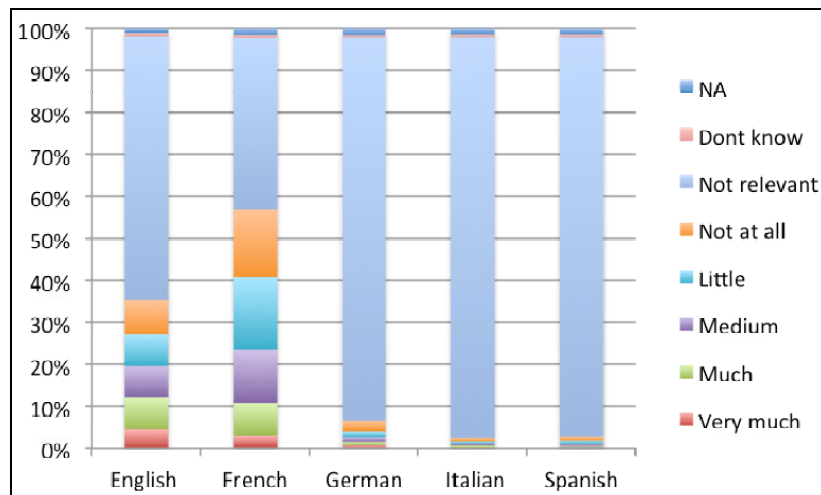


Fig. 5 - Relevance of foreign language knowledge acquired in secondary public education

### *Qualitative research*

The qualitative research complemented the quantitative research by explaining why the teaching-learning process on the whole is not particularly successful. The authors looked through different quality dimensions and perspectives in relation to student-teacher contact, curricula relevance, role and social positions of teachers and quality assessment process.

*Focus on student – teacher contact.* In our qualitative study we were interested in understanding the perspective of teachers on studying languages and how the students perceived the learning process and the contact with their teachers. Learning languages continue to be considered a monument to grammar and literature by teachers from public education system, as well as by older generations of learners. The quantity of information that students were required to reproduce in language classes is giving them a feeling of frustration, because after graduating they realize their inability to use the contents studied at school. The material is too theoretical and mainly useful only for passing exams. When they tried to use the acquired knowledge in communication, they rarely succeeded.

”Teaching English, I think my approach is more practical... and there are people who some times don’t agree with that, they want more grammar, more theory. [...] I think they are used to that, I mean especially the older generation, the younger people don’t... they usually come to the [private] school because we teach in a different way from the school where they are... And they often say: our teacher at school is boring, or she doesn’t teach us anything”

(Expatriate English teacher in a private school in Chisinau, interview, September 13, 2013)

*Focus on curricula.* The school curricula are revised every five years. The last update was in 2010 with the purpose to ensure the transition from a model, which focuses on achieving the curriculum objectives to one that focuses on developing the students’ skills. Representatives of the working groups that updated curriculum consider that they did not reach a wide consensus until now, neither for the teaching of local languages nor for the teaching of foreign languages. Concerning local languages, taught in Moldova (Romanian, as the official language, Russian, as second language and the minorities languages: Bulgarian, Gagauz, Ukrainian) they are languages in contact. For example, for certain students one of the above languages can be the first language, the second, or even the third: in this respect it is important to integrate in the curricula some insights into the languages in contact, instead of trying to teach Romanian as it is in Romania or Russian as it is in Russia. The exposure that the pupils are receiving to other languages can be very high, which will not automatically provide them with competences for human interaction. The challenge for the teacher is to use the pedagogical content knowledge in order to help learners to process and understand the resources, as well as enhance their competences.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richards, Jack C. *Competence and Performance in Language Teaching*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print, p. 5

“Our students now, we see that they were taught by a different method where they studied before, what they are missing now is an environment where Romanian is spoken correctly.”

(University teacher, author of Romanian language school books, member of curriculum working group, interview, September 26, 2013)

Starting with 2010 the foreign languages curricula is focusing on a scale of knowledge and skills, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio for learning, teaching and assessment. None of these are applied in practice. The curricula makers still debate about when to start teaching the grammar. Some of them insist on introducing it from the beginning, from the second grade when pupils start to learn foreign languages. They are 8 years old at that time. The ‘amount’ of literature is another topic for debate among curricula makers, as well as among teachers.

The cultural aspects that students can remember from foreign language classes are mainly linked to the traditions, cuisine, history and monuments. Some of these contents are probably already forgotten by the native speakers, but are still taught by the Moldovan public education system.

"For example, in French we have studied many different texts based on various, diverse topics, by doing this we learned about the culture of other countries, like in the field of nutrition and other fields [...] There were special topics on some rules of conduct: at the restaurant how to order, I had a lot of information about history, monuments. [...] It's too big this plan, this program...it introduces us to the topic ... but does not even give us the full information, but only because they need to follow the plan.”  
(University student in applied linguistics, interview, September 12, 2013).

*Focus on teachers.* Some interviewees mentioned that during the transition period, despite up-to-date curricula, despite the reconstruction and modernization of teaching facilities, the role and social position of teachers were not rehabilitated. Teachers, like medical doctors, lost the prestige of the social position they had during the Soviet time and they also lost an important part of their motivation. Even if some of them manage to maintain a decent or even very good economic situation, due to informal payments, they do not feel the importance of their work for the social dynamic and welfare anymore.

“Even when the curriculum is, let’s say very good, in the end what happens in the classroom depends on the teacher.” (Ministry of Education representative, interview, September 23, 2013)

From the discussions we had with some representatives of the working groups that developed curricula, we can conclude that about 90% of the teachers do not really understand the complicated requirements of this curricula and cannot meet its standards. The standards remain vague in many respects, because they have not been adapted for practical application. Teachers are attending training

supported by the public education system only once every 5 years, when the curriculum is modified. In-between trainings there are very few professional development possibilities supported by the public education system. At the same time, only some training needs are covered by the non-governmental sector. Therefore many teachers are still kept in a rigid framework of their linguistic disciplinary knowledge without distinguishing it from the pedagogical content knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

*Focus on quality assessment.* The representatives of the Ministry of Education mentioned that there is no clear decentralization policy related to education sector. At the same time the quality criteria and the quality assessment policies remain vague. The representatives of the Ministry of Education recognize that they do not have tools to monitor and evaluate the quality of the teaching process. The only evaluation tool is currently whether the curricula requirements are accomplished or not. This evaluation is mainly based on quantitative criteria. For this reason, they are planning to create an independent Agency, which will be in charge of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching:

“It's all about what competencies we want for our children when they finish school [...] at least the declared goal of the 2010 curriculum is the development of competencies [...] The child must demonstrate some noticeable behaviours denoting that he has the respective capabilities and what we need to work on is the evaluation. [...] We need a balanced combination between what is offered and how it is offered.”

(Ministry of Education representative, interview, September 23, 2013)

## Conclusions

Despite the efforts and invested resources, the Moldovan education system was not able in the last decade to effectively align the language education neither to the requirements of the local context, nor to the wider, European region and international contexts. Teaching of languages bears the weight of societal realities and ideologies. Teachers are perceived as one of the weakest links in the teaching/learning processes. They are not those in charge of guiding students through the learning process, encouraging them to discover. Instead, they appear only a mean to transfer knowledge and check if it can be reproduced.

The education system did not succeed in stimulating initiatives for a qualitative change. Teachers are not motivated to analyse the contents of curricula and adapt the teaching methods when necessary. The Moldovan authorities made efforts to formalize the use and teaching of local languages, as well as the teaching of foreign languages. Nevertheless, clear quality-related criteria were not set up. The quality of communication was never assessed or prioritized. However, we can witness a positive dynamics concerning the education policy in general: existing problems are acknowledged and debated, policy makers are looking for solutions and are open to dialogue.

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<sup>14</sup> Richards, Jack C. *Competence and Performance in Language Teaching*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print, p. 5

## Recommendations

Language education policy needs to be addressed at many levels simultaneously. Moldovan policy makers would add value if they were to reflect on aligning language education policies to the local context as well as to the wider, European and international contexts, taking into consideration the assessed needs and the demographic trends.

Teacher's education and motivation are critical needs in order to redesign the teacher-learner relationship and increase the efficiency of the language education. With regard to the demographic trends, teacher's education is an important component of the life-learning education.

Policy makers would benefit from a clear decentralization strategy with detailed description of the roles of the local authorities, school administration and teachers. Reducing the top-down governance in favour of a demand-based and bottom-up approach in learning languages might increase the efficiency of the learning process.

More solid relationship is necessary between learning and reality, alongside with more tailored and transparent approaches for assessing and recognizing competence. Policy makers might consider that the language education policies based on knowledge that can be transformed into wisdom contribute to the personal development and social dynamic of the students, bringing fresh air to the labour market.

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# SECOND GENERATION OR GENERATION OF CHANGE? THE IMPACT OF SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANTS ON THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF ITALIAN SOCIETY

Federico Zannoni<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: Migration and the ensuing multiculturalism and multilingualism are key factors of social change in our cities. The increasing presence of adolescents and young people from the second generation of immigrants is one of the most relevant issues. They ask to be recognized as members of a generation that is different from that of their parents, which has its own specificities. These persons are struggling with a never resolved past and with a complex present and, above all, they are part of the future of the Italian society.*

*Keywords: migration, adolescence, intercultural education, globalization, integration, multicultural society, conflict, identity, social trends, social changes.*

## Introduction

The growing presence on the social scene of young second-generation immigrants constitutes an important factor for innovation and change in the Italian context. This article aims to outline a wide framework on this phenomenon, in particular by analysing some of the main factors that can determine the outcome of the integration paths: the personal stories of immigration, the relations with the countries of origin, the everyday experiences, successes and failures at school. For this purpose, the qualitative data have been collected combining the contents of the scientific literature with the stories and the considerations that some of the second-generation immigrants have expressed in the first person, using several modes: novels and short stories, blog, responses to interviews.

The short stories and the novels written by young second-generation immigrant writers are getting growing popularity and success in Italy. Through the analysis of the works of some of the most renowned authors, we can obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences and of the feelings of many other young immigrants. These narratives are an important tool for disseminating claims and thoughts that belong to a growing number of people. Writing is an act of courage and responsibility. Thanks to the accessibility of blogs, today everyone can write, even those who do not have enough talent to publish books. In bookstores and on the web, the written productions of second-generation immigrants constitute an abundant reservoir of resources and information to achieve a better understanding of their life conditions.

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Next to the selected narrative pieces, also the stories and the feelings of some boys and girls attending upper secondary schools in the cities of Reggio Emilia and Ferrara will be reported. After a preliminary section containing definitions and statistical data, in the following paragraphs we are presenting some of the results of a qualitative research achieved through in-depth interviews with 13 boys and 18 girls aged between 14 and 22 years old, born in Italy or arrived at different times, with different cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins (Albania, Morocco, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ivory Coast, India, Philippines, China, Brazil, Moldavia)<sup>2</sup>.

### Definitions and data

According to the data released by the Statistical Service of the Ministry of Education, University and Research<sup>3</sup>, in the 2011/2012 school year at various levels of the Italian school system 755, 939 students with non-Italian citizenship were enrolled, representing 9% of the total number of students. 44% of them were born in Italy. To get an idea of the impetuous progress of the school population with foreign origins, it is sufficient to consider that, in the 1996/1997 school year, that number did not exceed 59, 389 (0.7%).

Scholars have long debated about how to define the immigrants' children, agreeing on the functionality of the paraphrase *second-generation immigrants*. It is an imperfect definition, disrespectful of the complexity of the universe of these new young people. We might ask: *second generation* in reference to whom? Since many of them were born in Italy, we could argue: *why immigrants?*

“Sono un’entità soprannaturale, sospesa fra mondo angelico e umanità, mutevole e decisamente inafferrabile. Un piccolo jinn buono, ma anche un po’ incazzato. Perché a volte dannatamente incompreso”<sup>4</sup>.

Jasmine is the literary alter ego of the writer Randa Ghazy in the novel *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno. Storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista*. The daughter of Egyptian parents, Jasmine was born and has grown up in Milan: according to sociologists she would not be a supernatural entity, but a perfect example of second-generation immigrant.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Filippini, Federica, Genovese, Antonio, & Zannoni, Federico. Fuori dal silenzio. Volti e pensieri dei figli dell’immigrazione. Bologna: Clueb, 2010. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, Servizio Statistico. Gli alunni stranieri nel sistema scolastico italiano, a.s. 2011/12. Oct. 2012. Print.

<sup>4</sup> “I am a supernatural entity, suspended between an angelic world and humanity, changeable and very elusive. A little good jinn, but also a bit pissed off. Because sometimes damned misunderstood”. Ghazy, Randa. *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno. Storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista*. Milano: Fabbri, 2007. Print. pp. 121-122. All the translations from the Italian editions in the paper have been made by Federico Zannoni.

Maurizio Ambrosini defines the second generation as the children of at least one immigrant parent, born abroad or in Italy<sup>5</sup>, and therefore:

- Children born in Italy from foreign parents;
- Minors who arrived after the birth for family reunification;
- Minors who arrived alone;
- Refugee children;
- Children sent over for adoption;
- Children born in Italy from an Italian and a foreign parent

A comparison between the different sub-categories reveals large differences with regard to experiences, problems of integration and available resources, as well as individual peculiarities of each child. The need to categorize allows us to bring order and to be less disoriented by the excessive heterogeneity, providing a basis on which to strike up conversations and reflections that can be characterized with sufficient rationality. Rumbaut<sup>6</sup> defines:

- Generation 1.25: minors who arrived in Italy after twelve years of age;
- Generation 1.5: minors who arrived between six and twelve years old;
- Generation 1.75: minors who arrived in pre-school age;
- Generation 2: children born in Italy from foreign parents;
- Generation 2.5: children born in Italy from an Italian parent and a foreigner.

The website [www.secondegenerazioni.it](http://www.secondegenerazioni.it) has been operational since 2006: created by a group of young sons of immigrants, it has quickly become a very popular environment in which to share experiences, thoughts, suggestions. On 7 March 2007, in response to the numerical definitions given by Rumbaut, the user Zanzara Tigre proposes a survey: “Caso mai facessimo bingo. Votate! A quale “generazione” appartenete? Date i vostri numeri”<sup>7</sup>. Together with the definitions of the sociologist, he proposes a “3.14 generation: Alias II”, and it was the most voted choice, reflecting a widespread rejection of the suggestion to be circumscribed within a number.

## **The integration factors**

### *The personal stories of immigration*

Besides the sarcasm and the legitimate grievances, it is necessary to recognize that Rumbaut has emphasized the importance of age as a determining factor for the paths of integration. Changing the habits and interrupting the friendships established in the native country, to face the many question marks that integration imposes, in an Italy that does not look as they had imagined, may be

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<sup>5</sup> Ambrosini, Maurizio. *Sociologia delle migrazioni*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005. Print. p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Rumbaut, Rubén. “Assimilation and its discontents: between rhetoric and reality.” *International migration review* vol. XXX, n. 4, 1997. Print. pp. 923-960.

<sup>7</sup> “Vote! To which “generation” do you belong? Provide your numbers”. Zanzara Tigre. “Questione di definizioni”. *secondeG2generazioni*. 7 Mar. 2007. Web. 20 Aug. 2013. <<http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/2007/03/07/questione-di-definizioni/>>.

more painful for boys and girls that have come to the new country in late childhood and especially in adolescence. A new language to assimilate, the experiences of loss and abandonment of affectively significant persons and places, the redefinition of relationships within families where parental roles may be weakened by so many difficulties, the need to make new friendships and the not always soft impact with schools and towns are some of the most critical elements, as Pardeep, who reached her parents after having spent five years with her grandmother in India, confesses: “During the first days I could not stay here, everything seemed empty”.

Pardeep is the protagonist of one of the many stories of children and young people reunited with their families through migration. At least in a first period, the pain due to the abandonment of certain close persons, usually grandparents or relatives, gets the upper hand over the joy of finally embracing the natural parents. During the first separation, children experience feelings of abandonment and anger and, during the intervening years spent with relatives or in residential institutions, such feelings are accompanied by a process of idealization of the distant parents, with whom contacts are generally limited to phone calls and, whenever possible, short visits. The moment of the reunification with the parents is never easy, it often generates mixed and contrasting reactions: the feelings of alienation and unfulfilled expectations are opposed to the joy of embracing the natural parents. Those parents look different from the parents who left a few years before, and even from those idealized during the years they spent far away. They are men and women with unexpected attitudes and behaviors, and also the context is often less idyllic than the one that the children could imagine. The fear of the betrayal committed by fathers and mothers that are no longer able to maintain the implicit promise to compensate in a short time the gap left during the years of abandonment goes hand in hand with the urgent need to begin a new path of mutual understanding, redefining roles and negotiating relationships within the reassembled family. The teenagers find themselves living the paradox of a sort of adolescence on the contrary: the forced bereavement during childhood is now followed by the need to feel physically and emotionally closer to their parents, to establish and determine the characteristics of the new-found proximity, in precisely that stage of development where a bereavement would be natural. The results can be happy, sometimes surprising, as in the case of Anxhela, who grew up in Albania, and came to live with her father after ten years: “He did not know me and I did not know him. The first year we were together he discovered many things about me that he had not known before. Now we’re all together, it is very beautiful”.

The difficulties and the challenges that those arriving as teenagers have to face are big, but, if well managed, their resources are powerful: at first, we can notice a complete awareness of their roots, then a greater awareness in dealing with the experience of migration, no longer completely right away, even when decided by others.

*The relations with the countries of origin*

“Il viaggio spinge le persone a sperare che in un altro Paese, in un altro clima, in un'altra lingua, troveranno quello che manca là dove sono. Spesso ho

percepito gli amici che partono come gente che si libera da una prigione. Perché la libertà sta sempre dall'altra parte. Finché l'altra parte non diventa la tua dimora. Allora il viaggio verso l'altrove che non esiste ricomincia”<sup>8</sup>.

Ornela Vorpsi at twenty-three moved from Tirana to Milan; now she lives in Paris and writes successful novels. The relationship that children and teenagers maintain with their place of origin depends not only on the age at which they left: a second important factor is the country of origin, with its cultural, geographical, economic and lifestyle aspects, and its relationships with the new environment of residence.

There are children and teenagers, born in Italy or who arrived when they were very young, that have not visited the country of their parents; they maintain partial and indirect knowledge of it, linked to television documentaries, lectures and family narratives that sometimes are anachronistic. Imaginative and mythological elements, dictated by the heart rather than reason, are inserted on the fragility of this substrate, in some cases dominating it, and lead to rework the relationship with the roots, that can take on the characteristics of rejection, affection or idealization.

Thanks to the availability of abundant and cheap travel connections, families from Eastern Europe and North Africa can do more frequent visits, in many cases every year, every summer, sometimes for Christmas and Easter. The boys and the girls have the possibility to get a current and realistic idea of the country that they visit; their gaze is generally attentive and sincere, but inevitably affected by the partiality of the few holidays spent there and by the mixed feelings developed during the long months spent elsewhere.

Despite the invitations, the heat and the smell of food, Ornela Vorpsi has stopped feeling part of the community that she had left:

“Ormai sono una perfetta straniera. Quando si è così stranieri, si guarda il tutto in modo diverso da uno che fa parte del dentro. A volte, essere condannati a guardare dal di fuori suscita una grande malinconia. È come recarsi a una cena di famiglia e non poter partecipare; si frappono una gelida finestra. Di un vetro bello spesso, antiproiettile, anti-incontro: loro ti scrutano, ti riconoscono, ti fanno dei segni perché tu entri e li raggiunga, pure tu li vedi e rispondi con gli stessi gesti, ma la cena si consuma qui, si consuma così. Dopo poco tempo smettono di invitarti, si stancano, il pollo arrosto gli sorride, il pollo arrosto sfornato al momento giusto è una vera consolazione. Le loro parole sono inudibili. Il loro calore lontano. Tu rimani spettatore”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> “The journey leads people to hope that in another country, in another climate, in another language, they will find what is missing where they are living. I have often felt the friends who leave as people who escape from a prison. Because freedom is always on the other side. As long as the other side doesn't become your home. Then the journey to somewhere else that does not exist is starting again”. Vorpsi, Ornela. *La mano che non mordi*. Torino: Einaudi, 2007. Print. pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> “Now I am a perfect foreigner. When you are so foreign, you look at everything in a different way. Sometimes, being condemned to look from the outside gives rise to a great melancholy. It's like coming to a family dinner and not to be able to participate; a frosty

The boys and the girls who regularly travel to the places of their origins can maintain relationships and interactions with relatives and old friends also through physical contact and are not limited only to phone calls and virtual chat: “It is clear that the distance cools down relations. My relatives now look at me differently. I honestly do not know what they really think, but I feel this difference”, admits Cristina, and adds: “The last time I went to Moldova I felt different from my peers, from my former classmates: in the way of thinking, or even in the way they dress, or in the interests that I have now. I felt a little different also due to the fact that here I feel a lot of pressure, I have so many things to think about, while they are at their home, they think more about having fun, maybe to do those things which are done by young people. When I lived there, we were in close contact, I used to meet them every day, it was another kind of relationship. But now, if I go there, I talk, I say my things, but I feel the distance, the diversity”.

#### *The everyday experiences*

The teenagers with migrant parents are different from the peers left in their country of birth, but also they are different from those encountered in the current country of residence; they feel far from the countries of their parents, and not completely integrated, in such circumstances rejected, in the countries of the present and of the everyday life. Even when everything would appear to suggest a complete assimilation, an element that shakes the castle comes: it could even be just a perceived prejudice, or a memory, the feeling of a failure, or even a simple doubt. The doubts of a girl with a Middle Eastern gaze in the fashionable Milan are those who torment Jasmine/Randa Ghazy. They sometimes become hard to bear :

“Fino a che lunghezza è lecita una gonna? Sotto il ginocchio? E poco sopra? L’aceto di vino si può usare per condire i cibi? Le tortine e le merendine con una bassa percentuale di alcool? Neanche quelle si possono mangiare? E vogliamo parlare dello strutto in certi tipi di pane? Quello ti manda dritto all’inferno? Per elencare solo alcuni tra i dilemmi più banali. Ed è credibile che a sollevare tutti questi problemi sia una ragazzetta “milanese” qualsiasi? O lei non è una vera musulmana? Ma in fondo chi lo decide? Esiste un patentino, un certificato? Se si avvisatemi, perdio, ci tengo davvero. Continua a piovere, e il caos dentro di me non accenna a smettere”<sup>10</sup>.

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window separates you. It is made by a thick, bullet-proof, anti-meeting glass: they scrutinize you, they recognize you, they make you signs because you come and join them. You see them and answer with the same gestures, but dinner is consumed here, it consumes as well. After a short time they stop inviting you, they get tired, the roast chicken smiles to them, roast chicken baked at the right time is a real consolation. Their words are inaudible. Their heat away. You remain a spectator”. Ivi, pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> “Up to what length is a skirt permitted? Below the knee? And a little above? Can vinegar be used to flavor foods? Cakes and snacks with a low percentage of alcohol? May I eat them? And what about lard in certain types of bread? Does it send you straight to hell? To list only some of the more mundane dilemmas. And is it credible that all these problems are raised by a little “Milanese” girl? Is she a true Muslim? Who can decide it? Is there a license, a certificate? If yes, let me know. It continues to rain, and the chaos inside of me

In Jasmine like in other boys and girls, the religious, cultural and generational affinities generate a tumult of identity that grows with the progress of their awareness. The teenager Hayat, born in Italy from Tunisian parents, is the protagonist of the previous novel by Randa Ghazy, *Prova a sanguinare*:

“Quelli come me hanno un bel po’ di difficoltà a convivere con se stessi. Odio tutto questo, vorrei essere o completamente bianca o completamente nera, o totalmente ricca o totalmente povera, vorrei vivere o sempre a nord o sempre a sud, vorrei una posizione stabile, una squadra di appartenenza, basta ballare di qua e di là, un po’ a destra e un po’ a sinistra, voglio riconoscermi in una sola famiglia, una città, uno stato, una società. Mi servono delle affinità, una comunanza d’intenti. Ecco, io faccio sempre una gran fatica a capire con cosa e con chi mi posso identificare e riconoscere. Me ne sto con un piede da una parte e con l’altro dall’altra, e non c’è modo di spostare tutti e due i piedi da una sola parte – e d’altronde quelli come me in genere non lo vogliono neanche, io non lo voglio, avere tutti e due i piedi da una sola parte, intendo dire – bè, quelli come me cercano per tutta la vita il connubio ideale tra le due dimensioni, perché sanno perfettamente che non potranno mai essere perfettamente inseriti in una sola di esse, semplicemente perché non le appartengono del tutto”<sup>11</sup>.

The children of the immigrants play with their Italian friends; when they become teenagers, they usually listen to the same music, they frequent the same places, they dress alike, they study the same things, they experience the same transgressions. They pursue the canons and the impositions of the same cultural model, generally they don’t want to imagine different behaviors and aspirations. Sometimes they are rejected and they develop oppositional positions, radicalizing their culture of origin, but this is increasingly rare. At the same time, even the most

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does not seem to stop”. Ghazy, Randa. *Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno. Storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista*. Milano: Fabbri, 2007. Print. pp. 148-149.

<sup>11</sup> “People like me have a lot of difficulties to live with themselves. I hate this, I would be either completely white or completely black, or completely rich or completely poor, I would like to live either always in the north or always in the south, I would like a stable position, a team to belong to, I want to stop dancing here and there, a bit on the right and a bit on the left, I want to recognize myself in one family, in one city, in one state, in one society. I need affinities, I need a sense of collective purpose. It’s always very hard for me to understand with what and with whom I can identify and recognize myself. I stand with one foot on one side and with the other foot on the other side, and there is no way to move both feet on the same side - and on the other hand people like me usually do not want it either, I do not want to have both feet on one side, I mean - well, people like me are spending their lifetime looking for the ideal union between the two dimensions, because they know that they can never be perfectly integrated in one of these, simply because they do not completely belong to any of these”. Ghazy, Randa. *Prova a sanguinare. Quattro ragazzi, un treno, la vita*. Milano: Fabbri, 2005. Print. pp. 27-31.

integrated boys and girls continue, with varying degrees of intensity and awareness, to be bound by the contents of the parental culture, in search of an identity that can increase self-esteem and social recognition. Ahmed Djouder, a former boy of the French banlieues, complains:

“Quando la smetterete di guardarci come immigrati, come stranieri, come ladri, come terroristi? Provate a immaginare un mondo in cui si parli di voi solo in termini di percentuali, di integrazione, di immigrazione, di emarginazione, di criminalità, di reati, di insicurezza. Provate a immaginare un mondo così, voi, i sostenitori dei diritti dell’uomo”<sup>12</sup>.

Identical and different compared to their peers, the sons and the daughters of the immigrants are also sons and daughters of their own time and of the globalized world. Compared to their parents, they have different feelings of belonging to Italy and to the country of origin, as well as different expectations for the future.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London from Indian parents and has grown up in the United States. In 2003 she wrote *The Namesake*: it is a real family saga, from 1968 to the present day, from Indian grandparents to American grandchildren. It all starts with an arranged marriage in Calcutta, followed soon by a transfer to Cambridge, in the United States. That is where Ashima gives birth to Gogol, the first born. Among misunderstandings, transgressions, excesses of affection and lacerations Gogol becomes a man, a successful architect in those United States that he never abandoned, and only at an adult stage of his life he could go back and reflect on all the previous stages, developing a new, soothing awareness:

“Gogol adesso sa che i suoi genitori hanno vissuto la loro vita in America nonostante tutto ciò che mancava, con una forza che lui teme di non avere. Lui ha passato anni a tenere a distanza le proprie origini; i suoi genitori, a colmare quella distanza meglio che potevano”<sup>13</sup>.

*Successes and failures at school*

Like the parents of Gogol in the United States, so the fathers and the mothers who arrived in Italy in adulthood felt from the first moment the lack of the native country, planning returns seldom achieved. Their inclusion in society has been defined *subordinate integration* and it has been realized at first through the labor market, through the employment in low-skilled and manual tasks, usually avoided by Italians, the so-called “works of the five P”: heavy (Pesanti), unstable (Precari), dangerous (Pericolosi), low-paid (Poco pagati), socially disadvantaged

<sup>12</sup> “When will you stop to look upon us as immigrants, as foreigners, as thieves, as terrorists? Just imagine a world where we are talking about you only in terms of percentages, integration, migration, marginalization, crime, insecurity. Just imagine a world like that, you, the supporters of Human Rights”. Djouder, Ahmed. *Disintegrati*. Storia corale di una generazione di immigrati. Trans. Ximena Rodriguez. Milano: il Saggiatore, 2007. Print. p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> “Gogol now knows that his parents have lived their life in America in spite of all that was missing. He has spent years to hold off his origins, his parents to bridge that distance as best as they could”. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *L’omonimo*. Trans. Claudia Tarolo. Parma: Guanda, 2006. Print. p. 331.



(Penalizzanti a livello sociale). Accepted as workers, they couldn't express claims or protests and they had to limit the manifestations of attachment to their own culture within their home. Their priority has been, and continues to be, to gain money to help relatives and to give their children a better future, to be built in Italy starting from education, which is considered as the essential gateway to find jobs of higher prestige and security. Ahmed Djouder's words can be applied to the foreign families in Italy:

“I nostri genitori esitano un po', soprattutto con le figlie. Ma in fondo sono fieri, perché danno grande importanza agli studi. È la consacrazione, il frutto di tutti i loro sforzi, di tutte le loro privazioni. Era lo scopo della loro vita: che i figli avessero accesso ai misteri della conoscenza e del potere. Loro non lo dicono, arrivano perfino a convincerci che non ci stanno chiedendo niente, che dobbiamo farlo soltanto per noi. Ma il loro sogno inconfessato è vedere i figli che riscattano il loro onore, il loro onore ferito”<sup>14</sup>.

According to the data on educational outcomes<sup>15</sup>, at the end of the first year of upper secondary school 12.2% of the pupils with foreign citizenship were not admitted to the next class, compared with 8.6% among Italian pupils. It is important to specify that, among boys and girls born in Italy from foreign parents, 71.4% of those who enroll in high school attends technical or vocational schools; the percentage rises to 78.4% if we consider those who were born abroad.

“Teachers do not have a strong role in the integration process; some of them are not interested, others do not exactly know how to proceed, maybe they feel a bit intimidated”<sup>16</sup>. Cristina arrived in Ferrara when she was sixteen, leaving Moldova and her father. Her Albanian classmate Borana adds: “I think that some teachers have prejudices, they sometimes say things whose implications they may not even fully realise, but unfortunately they are serious. Unfortunately, only foreigners realise these situations that teachers sometimes create in class”.

There are many reasons for the frequent failures at school, partly due to the linguistic, cognitive and behavioral difficulties, and to the unique life experiences

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<sup>14</sup> “Our parents hesitate a bit, especially with their daughters. But basically they are proud, because they give great importance to studies. It is the consecration, the result of all their efforts, of all their hardships. It was the purpose of their lives: to allow their children to have access to the mysteries of the knowledge and of the power. They do not say it, they even convince us that they are not asking for anything, that we have to do it just for us. But their unspoken dream is to see their sons and daughters who redeem their honor, their wounded honor”. Djouder, Ahmed. *Disintegrati. Storia corale di una generazione di immigrati*. Trans. Ximena Rodriguez. Milano: il Saggiatore, 2007. Print. pp. 59-60.

<sup>15</sup> Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, Servizio Statistico. *Gli alunni stranieri nel sistema scolastico italiano*, a.s. 2011/12. Oct. 2012. Print.

<sup>16</sup> The boys' and girls' speeches reported in the paper are part of the results of a qualitative research carried out by Federico Zannoni in the province of Reggio Emilia and Ferrara through in-deep interviews with 31 boys and girls with migrant backgrounds, attending secondary schools (14-22 years old). Cf. Filippini, Federica, Genovese, Antonio, and Zannoni, Federico. *Fuori dal silenzio. Volti e pensieri dei figli dell'immigrazione*. Bologna: Clueb, 2010. Print.

that each student brings with him/her, in part to the evidence that most likely young Cristina is right: some teachers “do not know exactly how to proceed, maybe they feel a bit intimidated”. Teachers feel disoriented, lost and insecure in dealing with these pupils; the well-established educational and relational strategies do not work anymore. Society has changed, and students with it. It is no longer possible to think in categories, it is not correct to distinguish Italians from foreigners, because these pupils are new, different individuals, that escape anachronistic membership criteria.

## Discussion

A great heterogeneity of individual situations emerges from the reported stories. Each classification can no longer reflect this complexity, but the definition of some reference coordinates can help us to better orient ourselves within it.

A first distinction can be made between children who were born in Italy and those who have arrived later, through migration. Especially if they have arrived during adolescence, the latter have to face the difficulties of the first impact and of the settlement in a new country: they have to learn a foreign language and to redefine their family relationships; they may meet feelings of grief and abandonment addressed to the country and to the people who have left.

During adolescence, young second-generation immigrants are facing not only the suffering that characterize a complex age, but also the tumults of identity linked to their condition of people living between two (or more) countries and two (or more) cultures. Misunderstandings with parents, loneliness, ghettoization in mono-ethnic friendships, homesickness, social, racial and religious discrimination constitute elements of vulnerability that second-generation immigrants have to face every day. The success possibilities of the integration process are closely linked to economic, social, cultural, relational and family resources that these people have. The heterogeneity of the current living conditions is accompanied by a common desire to pursue a better future that unites the parents and their children.

All the hopes of the first generation of immigrants are placed in the academic, personal and work success of their sons and daughters. The boys and the girls are aware of it, they experience (not always manifesting it) a bond of gratitude towards their parents that contributes to feed their ambitions; they are aware of being immersed in a multicultural society and they claim equal status and the possibility of emancipation and personal affirmation. Masters of a global culture too closely tied to the needs of trade and business, the immigrants of second generation require a role within the society in which they have grown up and where they imagine a future. One respondent defines them *the new Italians*. They do not regret this, or at least the author of the post published on the site [www.secondogenerazioni.it](http://www.secondogenerazioni.it) on December 5, 2007 does not regret:

“A me “nuovi italiani” non dispiace. Mi sa di svecchiamento. Mi sa di pagina voltata e altre migliaia ancora da scrivere. Secondo me “nuovi italiani” non siamo solo noi figli di immigrati. Sono anche le nuove generazioni di italiani con i quali siamo cresciuti. Quelli che non vedono più che siamo neri, gialli, bianchi. Quelli che non si chiedono neanche se abbiamo la cittadinanza italiana, lo danno

per scontato. Questi, secondo me, sono i “nuovi italiani”, speriamo solo che non siano una specie in estinzione”<sup>17</sup>.

### **Conclusion: *New Italians***

The changes in the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic composition of our society are leading to new definitions of common identities and belongings. In the context of a globalised, complex and fluid society<sup>18</sup>, the presence of the immigrants of second generation, most of them born in Italy, has definitively accelerated the crisis of the concept of Italian identity built on the unity of religion, language, race and territorial belonging.

The boys and the girls of the second generation were born in Italy, or they have arrived still young, but their distant origins violate a basic unity, while their bilingualism and the languages of the parents go against the unity of language; the term “race” is inappropriate, but the multiethnic composition of our society is evident everywhere; with regard to religion, even if by Constitution we live in a secular country, by history we consider ourselves Catholics, but among the first and second generations of immigrants there are Catholics next to Muslims, Hindus, Baptists, atheists, and so on. Inevitably you cannot deny to these boys and girls forms of identification, territorial and social belonging that exceed the principles listed above, because the fact is that these persons already belong to and identify themselves in the manifestations of our society. The new perspectives, expressed in new languages and codes, need to be listened, to develop a innovative starting point in order to understand the present and to try to figure out the future evolutions.

*New Italians* are the sons and the daughters of the immigrants, but also the peers with whom they grow up; these last ones do not have to deal with the identity turmoil due to the belonging to two or more cultures, but they have already learned to live in a multicultural society composed by citizens from different histories and

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<sup>17</sup> “I like the definition *new Italians*. It suggests rejuvenation. It suggests me a turned page and thousands more pages yet to be written. In my opinion, *new Italians* are not just us, children of immigrants. They are also the new generations of Italians with whom we grow up. Those who do not see anymore that we are black, yellow, white. Those who do not even ask if we have the Italian citizenship, but take it for granted. I think these are the *new Italians*, we just hope that they are not an endangered species”. N. p. “Nuovi italiani o New Italy?”. *secondeG2generazioni*. 5 Dec. 2007. Web. 20 Aug. 2013. <<http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/2007/12/05/nuovi-italiani-o-new-italy/#comment-2002>>.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Augé, Marc. *Futuro*. Trans. Chiara Tartarini. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012. Print; Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. Print; Bauman, Zygmunt. *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. New York. Columbia University Press, 1998. Print; Beck, Ulrich. *What Is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999. Print; Beck, Ulrich. *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. Print; Callari Galli, Matilde, and Scandurra, Giuseppe. *Stranieri a casa. Contesti urbani, processi migratori e giovani migranti*. Rimini: Guaraldi, 2009. Print; Morin, Edgar. *La Voie. Pour l'avenir de l'humanité*. Paris: Fayard, 2011. Print.

origins. Understanding the new Italians and being able to make us understand; listening to the instances that arise and making sure that they acknowledge those of the others; interpreting the signals and the silences as manifestations of what they fail to say; firmly and reflexively facing oppositional attitudes, but also seizing the tenderness under the surface that is sometimes tough and detached: there are many duties that await us, to try to redefine together the foundation for a renewed Italy, that knows how to appreciate and exploit the fresh energy brought by these young people with sometimes distant roots. Beyond the generations, beyond the ethnic groups, beyond the cultures, the future is already in the today; in the encounter between generations, cultures and ethnic groups, it will be possible to achieve cohesion and projects for the future, to ensure that, as soon as possible, teachers will stop feeling embarrassed in front of pupils that will be no longer “destabilizing”. In this way the school can confirm its role as an engine of progress and of social harmony, for everyone and with everyone.

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## DIALOGICAL INTERACTION IN THE ARTS: IS SOCIAL CHANGE POSSIBLE THROUGH LITERATURE?

Lucia Salvato<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: The paper proposes to consider literary writers as a potentially powerful driver of social change. It investigates how the implicit response of the readers is made apparent by a personal habit change. The viewpoint offered emerges from an analysis of poems and narratives by contemporary German and Italian writers. The analysis used to enhance student learning caused a positive personal change within them and developed into a new way of facing further challenging interpersonal circumstances.*

*Keywords: Habit Change; Social Change; Implicit Dialogical Interaction; Medieval and Renaissance Art; Werner Lutz; Ada Negri; Franz Kafka.*

### 1. Introduction

Social change tends to be related to political, economic, and cultural shifts and studied by specific disciplines.<sup>2</sup> This paper proposes a consideration of expressions of art, such as paintings and literary works, as a potentially powerful factor of social change. People are implicitly invited to reply to an artist's creation by identifying themselves with its content. In this form of understanding, an implicit dialogical interaction between artists and their public may be recognized, which may determine a change in one's life. The aim of this work is therefore to explore this form of understanding, in order to investigate how the implicit response of the public is first made apparent by a personal 'habit change'.

The originality of the proposed viewpoint emerges from the didactic experience which is achieved as a result of the analysis and the process of translation conducted on short poems of contemporary German-Swiss poet Werner Lutz (1930). The use of his poems to enhance student learning caused a positive personal change in them and this individual-level change then developed into a wider social change, that is to say, in the new way the students faced further challenging interpersonal circumstances.

The analysis is grounded in the theory of contemporary linguists and literary scholars, such as M.M. Bakhtin (1981), C.S. Peirce (1931-1958; 1976), O. Ducrot

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<sup>1</sup> *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*. Milan (Italy).

<sup>2</sup> An example of a brilliant social thinker is Zygmund Bauman. His latest works are about social changes in the so called "liquid modern world", which reflects an age of uncertainty; cf. Bauman, *Liquid Life*, 2005; *Liquid Times*, 2007. In the German field Niklas Luhmann's study of the social system in modern society ('systems theory') is also being applied by sociologists all over the world; cf. Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* 1997.

(1991) and J.R. Searle (1979; 1995), and it begins with the teachings of the Ancients, especially Cicero and Aristotle.

It is common knowledge that Cicero showed in his work *De oratore* the three functions of speech: *docēre, delectare, movēre*.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the analysis is on this third aspect (*movēre*), which in addition meant to involve and to ‘move’ the hearers, in order to make them ‘adhere’ to the proposed thesis. Before Cicero, Aristotle had identified this aspect with a purification phenomenon (*katharsis*), which was the real aim and the desirable effect that tragic poetic art had to have on the spectator. His starting point was the profound link he recognized between two spheres of human activity: poetic art and ethics. Poetic art aimed at the ethical education of the spectators, as passions were for them an essential element in their ethical behavior and in knowledge as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

The considerable importance of the arts has been acknowledged throughout the centuries. Human beings have always been in search of meaning in their lives and, in each generation, they have looked to works of art to shed light on their destiny. The arts strive to reach, and to make people reach, the true nature of man by depicting his anguish and his delight, his needs and his strengths, thus trying to ‘elevate’ human life. In this way, works of art ensure the growth of the individual and consequently the development of the community by means of a “supreme art form” called “the art of education”.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1. ‘Social Change’ Through the Arts: a Didactic Experience

This “art of education” can be found in almost all types of art. In the didactic experience, students can learn to look at a painting as an example of a particular typology of text, which is a communicative event between artists and their public. Italian students often have a preference for Medieval or Renaissance frescos because of the realistic way they depict people and reality, which enables the students to easily identify themselves with the figures.

Medieval and Renaissance art is the first example of educational form that, according to the Ancients, includes entertainment. At the end of the thirteenth century, for example, with Giotto di Bondone and Duccio di Buoninsegna, the flat world of the preceding painting style was transformed into an analogue for the real world. Before the variety of colors and the realistic human behavioral poses of the figures (cf. the *Scrovegni Chapel* in Padova, the Upper Basilica in Assisi and the Cathedral of Siena), the viewers saw their emotions reflected in the new pictorial space. Something similar happened in the mid-fifteenth century with the frescos painted by Masaccio in the *Brancacci Chapel* in Florence. As art was linked to instructional and educational purposes, the illiterate public could gain insight into biblical content and truths in a fascinating and intriguing manner, being thus

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<sup>3</sup> Cicero. *De oratore*, II, 27 115-116; II,28 121-122; II,77 310-312.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6,1449b 25-30; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152b 1-10; cf. Guastini. *Dalla poetica all’etica*, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II. *Letter to Artists*, 1999.

motivated to imitate the resolute approach of the figures towards their lives and fellow creatures.

A fruitful didactic experience can also be offered by the dramatic beauty of Michelangelo's painting *The Last Judgment* in the *Sistine Chapel* in Rome, which has the rare power to silence entire groups of students. The imposing portrayal placed before their eyes stimulates at once a reflective experience by making contact with something outside themselves. The fresco actually conveys a compelling significance that is usually neglected in everyday life: "the risk of man's definitive fall", which is the dramatic destiny of damned souls, who in Doomsday are far removed from salvation. Yet, at the same time, the colors and forms of the fresco become "a proclamation of hope, an invitation to raise our gaze to the ultimate horizon", by reminding viewers that human history is "a continuing tension towards fullness".<sup>6</sup>

#### 1.2.1. *Social Change Through Poetry: Werner Lutz - Ada Negri*

Similar didactic experiences are also possible by reading and analyzing literary works. Approaching a poem is like moving closer to an unknown person, whose glance reflects a particular outlook on life. Thus, whenever a literary text is approached, it initiates an endless labor of interpretation. This process ends up with the fascinating experience of identifying oneself with that specific outlook on life.<sup>7</sup> However, this requires time and the willingness to be not only emotionally, but also profoundly, changed.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, after reading a poem, the readers' eyes are enriched by the poet's worldview, and this provokes a change within them. This enriching experience consists of a modification of their *habitus*, that is, of their behavioral patterns regarding situations and the people around them. It is thus a psychic feature, which complements the social aspect of communication.

In linguistics, speaking of a *habit change* and of an undertaken *commitment* as a consequence of a dialogue, implies that a meaningful communicative event has successfully occurred between the interlocutors. As stated by Peirce, the communication is fulfilled when it does not leave everything invariable, but produces a meaning which involves a person as a whole. Reality actually sets men in motion by stimulating their response, which will be vigorous if they are disposed to activate a change in their habits, that is, in the laws they usually follow.<sup>9</sup>

In line with such acknowledgments, the action of learning should imply considerable effort, because for Peirce to learn means "to acquire a habit", the habit

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI. *Meeting with Artists*. 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rondoni, D. *La sorpresa nell'accostarsi*. 1995, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Many are the ways in which communication occurs and simultaneously changes people. They can be summarized according to three main levels. The *informative* and the *emotional* involve superficial or transitory changes, while the third level regards a long-lasting change in the behavioral patterns (*habitus*) in everyday life; cf. Peirce, *Collected Papers*. 1931, 221-226.

<sup>9</sup> For Peirce, a habit is an "acquired law", equivalent to a "disposition", which is similar to "some general principle working in a man's nature to determine how he will act"; Ivi, 1932, 100.

“of tossing aside old ideas and forming new ones”.<sup>10</sup> As observed in the encounter of the students with Michelangelo’s fresco, such a conversion is “always consequent upon impressive experiences”, which bring human habits into “an active condition” by creating “a habit of changing habits”.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, this *habit change* makes students “learn how to learn”, and this can “sustain a lifelong desire for learning”, both in the individual and in the social sphere.<sup>12</sup>

The analysis of didactic experiences that, as a first step, involve a change in the individual was inspired by some direct questions used in the poems by Werner Lutz. A poem such as the following:

Jemand fragt  
bist du auch Taucher  
tauchst du auch in dir  
nach dir<sup>13</sup>

can easily be felt by the reader as an impulse to provide an answer. In addition, as the narrating voice is addressing a general *you*, all the readers can identify themselves with this *you*, by feeling themselves invited to answer personally through their own introspection. The dialogical interaction therefore takes place only if the poem’s questions become the readers’ questions and this activates a personal modification in their life.

A link between the theoretical, linguistic aspects used in this work and the dialogical interaction in the arts is offered by the theory on dialogue by the Russian literary scholar and linguist, Bakhtin. He considers ‘dialogue’ as the primary means through which people communicate meaningfully with each other. In his work *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) he affirms that in any living conversation “every word is directed towards an *answer*”, to which “primacy belongs”, as it is “the activating principle” in which “understanding comes to fruition”.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Bakhtin highlights the implicit dialogical form and function of the novel, although such a form of art is not, strictly speaking, dialogical. His starting point is the enormous power of the ‘internal dialogism’ of a word, which can never be considered as an isolated and independent act, not even in a monologic utterance because, when language conveys a meaning, it means something for someone. In this way, “the arena for the encounter” is the subjective belief system of the recipients (the readers). Their understanding and response can be “deep and productive”, whenever their encounter with the author creates a sort of “fertile soil”, on which they build “a further creative development”.<sup>15</sup> This development is possible because, as soon as an author’s word penetrates into the readers’ interior,

<sup>10</sup> Peirce, *The New Elements of Mathematics*. 1976, 142.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Kankkunen, *How to Acquire ‘The Habit of Changing Habits’*. 2004, 383.

<sup>13</sup> Lutz, *Bleistiftgespinste*. 2006, 87 (‘Someone asks/are you a diver too/do you also plunge into yourself/towards yourself’).

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. 1981, 282; italics in the original.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem; cf. Ivi, 293, 347.



they question it and enrich it with their personal experiences, carrying into it their own accents and expressions, thus creating a “dialogizing background”.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Ducrot emphasizes the inevitability of an answer before *l'acte d'interroger*. In the quoted poem by Lutz, for example, the dialogical interaction between author and reader should take place as soon as the addressee feels somehow ‘obliged’ to answer that specific question. However, this invitation to answer can emerge in different ways. An example is highlighted by Searle when he draws attention to social facts that do not require language. The successful interaction between human infants and adults takes place *in praesentia* without the use of words and thanks to the reinforcement of the connection between connoted and referential elements.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the encounter with works of art is an example of allusive, connotative meaning expressed *in absentia*, because what is conveyed is usually suggested alongside the works, and their recipients must infer the meaning without the help of the author. Ducrot expresses this dynamic by speaking of a *signification implicite* combined with a *signification littérale*. As speakers or writers often have a mysterious *besoin d'implicite*, they cover specific contents (events, personal experiences, and even feelings and thoughts) with a sort of *loi de silence*, through which they convey something without saying it.<sup>18</sup> It is the recipient’s responsibility to infer and interpret the implicit meaning.

This paper will subsequently give further examples which have also been taken from literature regarding the ability of the readers to activate, also *in absentia*, a type of implicit dialogical interaction with the author of a literary work. This becomes evident in the didactic experience with younger generations. Through the analysis of poems, learners are introduced to the universal values communicated across ages and cultures, and this reinforces the link between tradition and modernity.

Poems can be a stimulus for students, especially when they encounter difficulties in writing their graduation theses, which is a first step into wider society. An example is offered by the change experienced by a student who was given the following words written by Werner Lutz:

Untertauchen und wieder auftauchen  
erst viel später  
vor einer unbekanntem Küste.<sup>19</sup>

After reading them, the student made up his mind regarding the effort he had to make and the time he had to spend (*viel später*, ‘much later’) to be able to see the results of his effort. Because of this poem, he further understood that his work was a challenge and his attempt was not in vain. It only had to be considered within

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<sup>16</sup> Ivi, 358.

<sup>17</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. 1995, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ducrot, *Dire et ne pas dire*. 1991, 4-8, 11-14.

<sup>19</sup> Lutz, *Bleistiftgespinste...*, 44 (‘To dive and come up again/much later/in front of an unknown shore’).

a wider context, the one regarding his future work. The poem actually conveyed to him the moral principle that people can reach their goal only if they are ready to struggle and to spend the required time on it. Moreover, as graduation theses are an important step in the social life of students, this young man produced a virtuous model for his future way of working with people inside society.

The analysis was then extended to poems and narratives of other contemporary (German and Italian) writers in which life is explored in its main features through intense and personal expressions of living and experiencing life.

Strictly connected to the previous extract by Lutz is a poem by contemporary Italian poet Ada Negri (1870-1945), whose content is a plain invitation to love one's own work, *Ama l'opera tua* ('Love your work'). The stimulus to reflect on the personal attitude towards one's own labor emerges from a series of imperative verbs, all in the second person singular. These verbs address the reader, who is directly involved in the conveyed content. Imperative forms like 'love your work', 'suffer for it your most beautiful and secret pain', 'give to it the sun of your days, the shadow of your nights'<sup>20</sup> are all an incitement to become aware of the importance that every moment dedicated to one's own work can have for the life of the individual, as well as for the society in which the individual lives.

Moreover, as Ada Negri's later poems turn to inner reflection and spirituality, they can become an occasion for 'social' change, if readers are willing to identify themselves with the content of the dramatic situations described in them. By going deep inside herself, into the wounds of her sorrowful life, she actually depicts all she had learned from her experiences. She thus involves readers in her inner changes before life's challenges, by rousing their souls through recurring questions and intense phrases.

Her poem *Il dono* ('The gift') is another example. In the first part, she expresses profound sorrow for a gift she has been waiting for all her life but never received. The second part is, however, the description of a rare moment of abandon and inner happiness during which she becomes aware of what is truly the real gift she has been longing for: the flood of her vermilion blood she has always been receiving from life. It is a secret flowing in her veins, a beating in her wrists, and a sparkling light in her eyes, which she starts to love, simply because it is (her) life.<sup>21</sup> However, her poetry never expresses just sorrowful mourning. It always communicates a final ardent hope, forever awaiting a great love even if it never materializes, because she never surrenders.

### 1.2.2. 'Social Change' Through Prose: Franz Kafka

Because of the didactic experience with the poems by Werner Lutz and the profound effect that Ada Negri's innate passion for human life has on readers, a

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<sup>20</sup> "Ama l'opera tua. Soffri per essa/la tua pena più bella e più segreta./Donale il sole de' tuoi giorni, l'ombra/delle tue notti." Negri, *Poesie*. 1956, 745.

<sup>21</sup> "Scorre intanto il fiume/del mio sangue vermiglio alla sua foce:/e forse il dono che puoi darmi, il solo/che valga, o vita, è questo sangue: questo/fluir segreto nelle vene, e battere/dei polsi, e luce aver dagli occhi; e amarti/unicamente perché sei la vita." Ivi, 769.

similar challenge was offered to an entire group of students on a Master's degree course. In addition, as the course was on expressive techniques of German as a foreign language, the short text *Gemeinschaft* ('Fellowship') by Franz Kafka was proposed.<sup>22</sup>

The one-paragraph story is about five friends who leave a house and position themselves in a row, one after the other. Since that moment they have been living together. They are together and want to remain together, living a peaceful life, until an interfering factor emerges. Another person would like to be part of their group by joining them as a sixth member but, although there is no specific reason, they refuse to admit him. Thus, as many sentences and verbs demonstrate, they remain impervious to change. Nevertheless, the story concludes with a remarkable statement:

no matter how he pouts his lips we push him away with our elbows,  
but however much we push him away, back he comes.<sup>23</sup>

These words testify that the person's desire to be part of the group is real, tenacious, and persistent. The theme of the story is, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, there is a closed-minded party which forces the exclusion of a new person. On the other, there is an unknown person, who dares to desire (and makes every effort to do so) to be part of the 'circle' of friends. At the end of the story this profound and continuous desire overturns the point of view and this raises questions in the reader regarding the different attitude of the characters.<sup>24</sup>

Kafka's literary story is actually *fictional* and, as such, it conveys a particular connection between the literal meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the writer's utterance. Furthermore, in line with Searle's words concerning works of fiction, even Kafka's story "conveys a 'message' or 'messages' which are conveyed *by* the text but are not *in* the text".<sup>25</sup> The writer means what he writes, but he also means something more, which the reader must infer. This ability is based on the awareness that the story would be "obviously defective if taken literally", so that the reader "is compelled to reinterpret it in such a way as to render it appropriate".<sup>26</sup> According to the didactic project, the students had to infer what the author wanted to share with them and they had to judge a similar personal experience in light of it.

In order to do this, they were asked to answer some questions, by stating if they agreed with the rejection by the five friends. They had to write if they had

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<sup>22</sup> Kafka, *Die Erzählungen*. 1995, 308sq.

<sup>23</sup> Kafka, "Fellowship". *The Complete Stories*. 1971, 275.

<sup>24</sup> The inestimable power of man's desire was expressed by the American writer Don DeLillo in the opening of his novel *Underworld*, "Longing on a large scale is what makes history", and it was somehow explained with following words: "The game doesn't change the way you sleep or wash your face or chew your food. It changes nothing but your life". Cf. DeLillo, *Underworld*. 1999, 11, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Searle, *Expression and Meaning*. 1979, 74; italics in the original.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, 112sq.

experienced a similar situation in their lives and how they had reacted, if they had perceived that their closed circle was suffocating, and if they consequently had desired to expand it. As they felt involved in the content of the story, they reacted by answering openly. All of them had lived through a similar situation, but they admitted that their encounter with Kafka's words had enabled them to better judge the past event.<sup>27</sup> They became aware that the rejection emerges from a negative attitude (*hábitus*) toward people and life in general, and destroys any possibility of experiencing new worlds.

As Albert Camus wrote, the destiny and possibly the grandeur of Kafka's work consist in offering all possible solutions without indicating any one in particular.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the metaphorical utterance of his work stimulates readers (and students) to read his words more than once to grasp what the author's utterance might have meant ("speaker's utterance meaning") among the expressions he uses ("word, or sentence, meaning").<sup>29</sup> But to catch the "semantic content other than its own meaning"<sup>30</sup> the students required an 'extra element' which is the ability of their inference to understand what is (or should be) actually meant.

The didactic experience with Kafka's story therefore clarifies that communicative events (and therefore also works of art) are successful when they result in the interlocutor's response (and related responsibility) to the content received through them, even when this content remains somehow implicit.

### 1.3. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it is worth quoting the following words from the *Letter to Artists* written by Pope John Paul II:

[Works of art] not only enrich the cultural heritage of each nation and of all humanity, but they also render an exceptional social service in favour of the common good.<sup>31</sup>

What does this "exceptional social service" consist of?

The didactic experiences with Lutz, Negri and Kafka have shown that the beauty and the content conveyed by works of art have the special power to involve the viewer in a personal experience, which can be identified with "the care of the

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<sup>27</sup> As underlined by Benedict XVI, the experience of beauty "leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, [...] transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful"; Benedict XVI. *Meeting with Artists*. 2009. Not surprisingly, the 'world of the books' has been seen as the sole key to comprehend 'the book of the world'; cf. Serrano, *El mundo de los libros ilumina el libro del mundo*. 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Camus, *La speranza e l'assurdo nell'opera di Franz Kafka*. 1947, 190.

<sup>29</sup> Searle, *Expression and Meaning...*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, 90.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II. *Letter to Artists...*

soul” and “the unity of the self”.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the exposure to beauty predisposes the viewer to the good and the true, and this is profoundly edifying because it enables people to recognize the difference between beauty and ugliness and, consequently, between good and evil, “making the soul graceful”.<sup>33</sup> This pedagogical recognition consists of the *change* that the individual experiences in life and which actually starts in the soul.

According to Solzhenitsyn, since beauty is a privileged route to both the true and the good, art is important in helping the modern world because it has a profound impact on a person’s moral character.<sup>34</sup> This is the original contribution which artists offer to the history of culture. Not surprisingly, in *The Idiot* by Dostoevskij, one of his characters asserts that the world will be saved by beauty.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, works of art and the beauty they convey, understood in the light of the Ancients, enable the viewer to experience ‘the joy of knowing’, which is intellectual enjoyment. This joy allows people to come into contact with their true selves, with their longing to be united “with the True, the Good, and the Beautiful”, and this desire causes a sort of “remaking of the self”, a redirecting of one’s own life “to the true good and the ultimate *telos*”.<sup>36</sup>

This ‘remaking’ and ‘redirecting’ of man’s life has been here considered as the effect of a dialogical interaction between artists and their public. This interaction should comprise the first concrete step of a personal *habit change* towards a consequential, wider *social change*. Further studies may explore - from a didactic point of view – other forms of this kind of dialogical interaction across different European languages and expressions of art.

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<sup>32</sup> Ramos, *Art, Truth and Morality*. 2009, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Lecture*. 1970.

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# INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Rosita Maglie and Annarita Taronna<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: Based on our experience of teaching English to undergraduate students in Primary Education at the University of Bari, this paper aims to explore PPETs' understanding of the use of such authentic material as fiction, non-fiction, folktales, fairy tales which can lead teachers in general to deconstruct most of the stereotypes on major vs minor ethnic groups, white vs black people(s) that have frequently been passed down from generation to generation as a result of ignorance and misunderstanding. Specifically, we propose a wider range of options based on the importance of using literature in the classroom – that portrays a variety of cultures, themes and views – as one of the most powerful didactic strategies to shape good practices in teaching English for primary school children.*

## 1. Introduction

Since interculturality is still quite a novelty in the field of foreign language teaching, it is easy to understand that so far there are more theoretical discussions than practical suggestions. In order to fill this gap between intercultural theory and practice, the objective of this study is to provide a teaching instrument to put into practice the theoretical definition(s) of interculturality and intercultural competence as presented so far without losing sight of the language teaching curriculum. Indeed, training PPETs in cultural diversity can play a leading role in today's society as it may well be an important step towards reaching two main educational goals: a) assisting children as they develop into productive citizens in a pluralistic society, and b) educating them about other ethnic groups, helping bridge differences and create an atmosphere for more positive interactions among individuals.

Within this in mind, the research attempt here is to demonstrate that what we need in prospective teacher education are not better generic strategies for “teaching multicultural education” or “teaching for diversity”, but rather productive ways of constructing progressive, holistic and engaged pedagogy, as suggested by hooks (1994: 15). Specifically, she promotes a notion of praxis as a combination of reflection and action which requires teachers to be aware of themselves as practitioners and as human beings if they wish to teach pupils in a nonthreatening, anti-discriminatory way. Thus, the goal of any teacher should be to develop self-

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actualisation and intercultural competence through the “decolonisation of ways of knowing” (hooks 2003: 3) and systematic self-critical inquiry. Shifting from theory to practice, this paper has a fundamental research aim: to train PPETs to develop intercultural competence through multiethnic children’s literature. Such authentic material can lead teachers in general to deconstruct most of the stereotypes of major vs. minor ethnic groups, religions and gender identities, white vs. black people(s), that have frequently been passed down from generation to generation as a result of ignorance and misunderstanding. Of course, introducing such literature to pupils requires background information prior to the reading of the text, as we have attempted to demonstrate in the next paragraphs related to the discussion of specific teaching strategies. Specifically, we use ‘historical’ biographies to help PPETs learn that individuality can be a source of a community’s strength and can be taught and shared at schools with their pupils, hoping the books chosen will inspire both teachers and children to be themselves and make a difference. To this end, we propose specific children’s books about race issues, religious diversity and gender diversity as key-examples of the way multiethnic literature can be incorporated in primary classrooms to develop reflective cultural, national, and global identifications, that is to say intercultural competence, by which pupils as well as teachers can acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within and across diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious groups.

## 2. Developing intercultural competence

This study is based on our long experience of teaching English to Prospective Primary English teachers (PPETs) which has served as both the context and the content of our courses for shaping but also being shaped by theories, policy analysis and studies of practice circulating in the field. In particular, we have deliberately chosen to specialize in the field of cultural diversity for two main reasons: on the one hand, because the topics of culture and diversity denote contrasts, variations, or divergences from mainstream or majority culture; on the other hand, because cultural diversity in Italy as well as in many other countries is not only changing the composition of the national population, but is also enriching the character of life turning, for example, the classroom from a mere educational setting into a polychromatic place that can be considered a microcosm of society.

Crucially, in Italy and in other countries increasing societal metamorphosis means that children now interact with different cultures, languages, faiths and traditions on a regular basis. All the more so due to the Libyan conflict of 2011 which is an additional factor turning Italy from a land of emigration to a land of immigration. Reading books such as *La ricerca per una scuola che cambia* (2007), *Processi educative nelle società multiculturali* (2007) and *L’educazione al tempo dell’intercultura* (2008), we find fresh evidence of the wide and articulated panorama of the current Italian situation concerning ethnographic education<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Ethnographic education is a branch which has been pioneered in Italy by Francesca Gobbo, also the editor of the books cited above in the body of the text.



Amongst other issues, this change has brought to the surface the need to consider education not in terms of ‘integration’ (as this label implies a single model to be achieved and complied with) but more as “a flowing process where intercultural approaches have revealed the issue of intracultural differences as well” (Giorgis 2011: 127) since present day immigrants come from different sides of the Mediterranean Sea. However, also keeping an eye on European and international contexts, we realize that the phenomenon of immigration has already become structural to all societies, and that pondering education should imply “a reconsideration of the relations, the rights and the opportunities for societies” (Giorgis 2011: 127) and for each of their members because only thanks to a conscious and constant reformulation and reworking is everybody able to move, improve and empower the individual and collective horizon of education and culture (Giorgis 2011: 128).

This new world landscape of diversity calls for an urgent emphasis on intercultural competence<sup>3</sup> that should be addressed in the actual education of both teachers and children. The development of intercultural education has now been going on for over two decades, since its principles and aims were firmly embedded in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Learning, Teaching, Assessment*<sup>4</sup> (Council of Europe 2001), being summarised as follows

In an intercultural approach, it is central objective of language learning to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (2011: 1)

According to this document, intercultural communicative competence is conceived of as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. With reference to Byram’s work (2008), this can be condensed into a list of five aspects as follows: (a) knowing the self and the other; (b) knowing how to relate and interpret meaning;

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<sup>3</sup> In its broadest context, pedagogical intercultural competence is the ability to effectively teach cross-culturally. It is not a new idea. It has been called “ethnic sensitive practice” (Devore & Schlesinger 1981), “cross-cultural awareness practice” and “ethnic competence” (Green 1981), and “ethnic minority practice” (Lum 1986) by intercultural mediators. It has been referred to as “intercultural communication” (Hoopes 1972) by those working in international relations and as “cross-cultural counselling” and “multicultural counselling” (Ponterotto, Suzuki and Alexander 1995) in the field of counselling psychology. In education, early efforts at preparing for intercultural competence were labelled “ethnic studies” and then “multiethnic education” (Banks and Banks 2004). Other early terms included “education of the culturally different” and “education for cultural pluralism” (Gibson 1976). Today, “cultural diversity” (Marshall 2002), “culturally responsive teaching” (Gay 2010), “cultural proficiency” (Lindsay, NuriRobins and Terrell 2009) and “multicultural education” are most frequently used (Banks and Banks 2004) as umbrella terms for approaches and strategies underpinning culturally competent teaching.

<sup>4</sup> This guide contains some detailed proposals on how intercultural language education should be inserted into European language programmes.

(c) developing critical awareness; (d) knowing how to discover cultural information; and (e) knowing how to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others.

In a general communicative language curriculum, cultural competence has traditionally been viewed as knowledge about the “life and institutions” of the target culture. Intercultural learners thus use language to explore their own and other different cultures; to search for meaning communicated via spoken, written or nonverbal communication, in a variety of manners, genres and contexts; to mediate in those situations where cultural misconceptions may occur; to consider alternative ways of being and acting; and to foster empathy, open-mindedness, genuine curiosity towards and respect for others. The intercultural classroom, at its best, can become “a safe space for engagement with differences in belief and ideology, not so that some false consensus can be imposed, but in order to promote genuine understanding and respect” (Corbett 2010: 5).

In the vision introduced for the first time in the present essay, intercultural teaching /learning of the second/foreign language implies that English can be learnt not only through British and American cultures but also through the immigrant children's cultures. Learners therefore become “intercultural diplomats” (Corbett 2003: 208), negotiating between the contrasting worldviews of their home and target cultures. The general idea of this cross-cultural communicative competence is that the learner is guided to develop strategies for bridging gaps between his/her (imperfect both for Italian children and immigrant ones) use of the foreign language and culture, and the home and immigrants' cultural heritage (since Italian and immigrant children have scant knowledge of either one or the other). On the other hand, the concept behind this intercultural behavioural competence is also that the learner should improve his/her capacity to communicate and integrate, show empathy, patience and tolerance as they come into contact with a new culture, not only one as potentially dominating as Anglophone culture – that is an inescapable fact of contemporary life – but mainly culture(s) with minority status.

### 3. Crossing the color line: educating PPETs on race issues

Although the proliferation of labels used to define pedagogical intercultural competence reflects the wide variety of the theoretical perspectives and approaches developed on the topic across the world, it is also generally true that common steps, skills and strategies can be detected. Indeed, drawing on our experience as teachers of ESL (English as Second Language) for PPETs, several generalisations can be made and some common approaches can be suggested:

- Discover and clarify the pupils' own cultural **viewpoints**: begin by ascertaining their own beliefs, values and practices. To appreciate other cultures, they must be clear about their own;
- Learn to be more culturally competent: examine the cultures represented in the community where they live. See what cultural groups there are which they know very little about or that they would like to learn more about;

- Examine the stereotypes about other groups that they have in the classroom or that they have encountered: help them do a self-inventory to find out what they know about any stereotypes associated with those groups;
- Read about people from other cultures and languages they are supposed to meet, work with or teach about;
- Consider the importance that this content can have when planning and designing their future classroom experience.

In order to achieve such educational goals, on the one hand the theoretical rationale for this study is to use multiethnic children's literature to help PPETs develop and expand intercultural understandings and exchanges by depicting individual characters and their stories that echo the cultural heritage of a translocal community and by exploring the effects of racism and prejudice in the lives of ordinary individuals. On the other hand, the practical rationale here is highly experiential since it emerges from the lack of awareness that many white pre and in-service teachers have regarding their own "whiteness", the privileges their skin colour has granted them, the power of racism and the way that it can operate in educational settings. Indeed, too many in the profession appear to be not only colour blind but also "colour deaf" and "colour mute" when it comes to discussions of race and ethnicity that may even cause discomfort, guilt, anger and denial.

With this in mind, three specific stories have been selected as key-examples for designing lesson plan sessions which could help PPETs experience how literature can be used and taught as a catalyst for social action in crossing the colour line and building bridges among countries: *If a bus could talk. The story of Rosa Parks* by Faith Ringgold; *Only passing through. The story of Sojourner Truth* by Anne Rockwell; *Peaceful Protest. The Life of Nelson Mandela*<sup>5</sup> by Yona Zeldis McDonough. As we can infer from the titles, as well as from the book covers (see paragraphs 2, 3, 4), the three stories share the topic of the civil rights related to two specific geographical contexts: the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the US (1896-1954) and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (1960-1993). At this point, we must briefly engage in ethnic studies, slave narratives and non-violent fight for equality to destabilise the conventional meanings and inscriptions that the superordinate cultures, the Euro/Anglo/North American cultures, have traditionally attributed to the concepts of race, racism and racial prejudice. In particular, we need to draw here on DuBois's concept of the colour line<sup>6</sup> and the

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<sup>5</sup>At the time of concluding this article (5 December 2013), it is with the deep regret that we have learned of the passing of Nelson Mandela following a lung illness. We want to express our sadness at this time. No words can adequately describe the enormous loss to the world.

<sup>6</sup>Although this proposition gains prominence in the forethought of the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), DuBois had already introduced the concept of the color line—as follows below – in his "Address to the Nations of the World" on behalf of the first Pan-African Congress: "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the question of how far differences of race—which show themselves chiefly in the color of skin and the texture of the hair—will here after be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization" (1900a: 125).

role he assigned it in African and human history (Butler, 2000; Fontenot, 2001; Juguo, 2001; Rabaka, 2001). The colour line is established when Europe problematizes the existence, meaning, colour, worth, and status of the peoples of colour by constructing a bio-social identity called race (Gordon, 2000a) which became in the world's thought a designation of devaluation, degradation and domination. The system of social practice which is organized around this concept of race on the national and international level is racism. It is important here to distinguish racial prejudice and racism: the former is an attitude of hostility and hatred toward persons and peoples based on negative assumptions about biology and culture; the latter is the imposition of such attitude as social policy and social practice. In other words, racism is a system of denial, deformation and destruction of a people's history, humanity and right to freedom based exclusively or primarily on the specious concept of race" (Ibid., 305).

The revolutionary aspect of Du Bois' thought also lies in his conception of Africa as the place of origin of the basic culture of African Americans in the larger sense of the descendants of Africa who are "spread though the Americas and now writhing desperately for freedom and a place in the world." It is these Africans in the diaspora who with their brothers and sisters on the African continent, must imagine and pose a new paradigm of human freedom rising up in resistance, wage fierce and heroic struggles for liberation and higher levels of human life. This is precisely the kind of social action endorsed by the protagonists of the three stories, that is Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth and Nelson Mandela, who represent what Du Bois advocated as a new paradigm of struggle to expand the realm of human flourishing in the world, and through this, to pose and bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest and most promising sense. In this light, it can be useful to retrace a brief profile for each of the selected historical biography in order to detect some of their common features: Sojourner Truth was a prominent abolitionist and women's rights activist. Born a slave in New York State, she had at least three of her children sold away from her. After escaping slavery, Truth embraced evangelical religion and became involved in moral reform and abolitionist work. She collected supplies for black regiments during the Civil War and immersed herself in advocating for freedpeople during the Reconstruction period. Truth was a powerful and impassioned speaker whose legacy of feminism and racial equality still resonates today. Similarly, Rosa Parks is best known for her refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in 1955. Her action galvanized the growing Civil Rights Movement and led to the successful Montgomery bus boycott. But even before her defiant act and the resulting boycott, Ms. Parks was dedicated to racial justice and equality. She remained a source of inspiration and, most importantly, an activist for the remainder of her life. Finally, Nelson Mandela was born in 1918. He became President of South Africa in 1994 and retired in 1999. He was in prison from 1962 to 1990 for trying to overthrow the pro-apartheid government. After he left prison, he worked to achieve human rights and a better future for everyone in South Africa. He never wavered in his devotion to democracy, equality and learning. Despite terrible provocation, he never answered racism with racism.

In the light of these premises and motivations, the English teacher educator can give a brief introduction to the history of South Africa, the African diaspora and the settlement of African-American communities in the US in order to prepare PPETs to read/listen/translate/retell/discuss the suggested stories. They can work in small groups to examine the main events concerning the South-African and African communities under discussion through the support of a world map. They are also invited to use Google to search for additional background information such as recent surveys which indicate, for example, that South Africa's multi-ethnic society is reflected in the constitution's recognition of 11 official languages which is among the highest number of any country in the world, or that there are approximately 36 million African Americans in the US, representing 12.3 percent of the total population. On this background, PPETs will be able to a) learn some relevant stages of the history of the South Africa and the US with a crucial focus on the system of racial segregation in both countries; b) make comparisons between past immigration flows to the US and the current ones to Italy mainly from the North African coast; c) detect/learn/teach cultural references attributed to the ethnic communities under discussion; d) become more familiar with the biographies and stories of Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Nelson Mandela and with the collective value of their protest; e) experience a recreation of some of the feelings, challenges and decisions facing people in this country as they lived in a system of legalized segregation and discrimination. Furthermore, some crucial language objective can also be achieved since PPETs will be able to a) understand the hegemonic role that English as the colonizer's language has played in South Africa and its co-existence with the other official languages; b) recognise African-American not just as a vernacular variety of the English language but as a language of its own; c) teach multicultural varieties of the English language through the use of children's multiethnic texts as those discussed here.

The English teacher educator can also propose a set of engaging teaching strategies which PPETs can develop with their future Primary School students after reading out the three stories. For example, by showing and sharing the title pages and front covers of the books, s/he asks PPETs to identify the setting of the story and the different characters portrayed by race, age and what they are doing; to make predictions about the story; to make a graph of their physical diversity choosing categories such as light skin, dark, skin, tall, short, curly hair, straight hair; to think about their countries, towns or homes and say if they have ever set any kind of racial prejudice between people(s).

The set of strategies suggested so far are based on teaching students that freedom is a cross-cultural value that is often taken for granted to such an extent that people think about it or erect it as a value only when their freedom is endangered. As a class, the Primary English teacher discusses what it takes to be a free person and gives examples of the dos and don'ts of freedom. Students can then draw a picture of themselves and their daily gestures of freedom (i.e. freedom of speech, of movement, of choice, etc.). The students' assignments can be made into a book or a class display.

#### 4. Education for All: Promoting Interfaith Dialogue through Children's Literature

Intercultural children's fiction in the EFL classroom has become a focus in recent years since learners have become more diverse. This new educational landscape of diversity has thus called for a urgent emphasis on intercultural awareness and competence that should be addressed in actual child education. Children who come from different parts of the world should have access to an appropriate literature and an environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity in the classroom. The perpetuation of white Christian culture in the classroom will impede children of colour or of other(ed) religions to identify with characters, induce them to feel like they were out of place, had nothing to read and relate to. When children cannot find themselves or their lives reflected in the classroom literature, they are less engaged and interested in the learning process.

In this paper we intend to launch a interfaith dialogue-driven change project for the elementary grades which uses carefully chosen stories from and about the various religions to help students get some sense of what these traditions are all about — to see them from the inside, stimulate appreciation of diversity in the classroom and to build an understanding of and respect for people from different cultures and religions. However, PPETs who wish to offer dialogue-driven change perspectives, promote change through education, and to act as bridges between different religions and realities, require ad-hoc training and more thoughtful curriculum planning in order to stimulate pupils to be social agents who rethink diversity and hope to convert that difference from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding. Although teaching about religion(s) is not a new subject in the curriculum, the project here proposes a “dialogue didactics” (Leirvik 2011) which conceives a new collaboration among scholars of religion, educators, members of the faith communities, and ESL scholars, educators and teachers to teach world history and English in multidisciplinary, skill-based courses at the appropriate grade levels. In so doing the ESL lesson about religions involves other subject matters such as civics, as teaching about religion clarifies the ideals on which people base their systems of governance; geography and cultural studies, as learning how people all over the world have articulated their beliefs improves understanding of common values and alternative ways of meeting needs and solving problems, and history as the study of religious tolerance and intolerance in history –validation and acceptance of those unlike ourselves or rejection and – demonization brings to the surface the most vital elements of civil society, beyond sterile descriptions of administration and laws (Douglass, 2000).

Moreover, knowing about the beliefs and practices of people who share this world with us is vital to the future (Douglass, 2000). In Italy, where people of many nations, faiths, and ethnicities live together, all of us as citizens have the responsibility to learn about one another so that we can unite in positive social conduct and accept civic education as a way to reinforce the practice of equity and religious freedom enshrined in the Italian Constitution. But again these principles

are hollow if we do not know one another. More broadly, learning about the history, cultures, and belief and value systems of peoples who follow and practice a religion different from ours, engenders respect and understanding. Going beyond wary, silent tolerance, the guidelines and mandates in current state and national standards should allow parents to send children into classrooms where they learn about their own faiths and those of their classmate sitting at the next desk, the neighbour, the future colleague, or the world at large, in an academically and constitutionally sound framework. To become dialogue-driven change activists, PPETs thus should learn personally both to appreciate cultural/religious differences, and to understand that all people share common values. We propose a viable practice in teaching English as a foreign language about/through religions which presents religious figures objectively and authentically in the context of the sacred narratives told through the ages. Using accurate terminology from within each faith, we try to enter “the realm of the between” (Buber 2002: 243), the “Third Space” (Bhabha 2004: 56), i.e. the classroom considered as a possible arena for interreligious dialogue and change. In particular, Buber’s characterization of the realm between, as well as Bhabha’s notion of Third Space add invaluable insight to the understanding of intercultural/interreligious interaction in “dialogue didactics”:

It is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of the culture...by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves (Bhabha 2004: 56).

The class thus becomes a common ground (Haynes & Thomas 2001) which exposes students to a diversity of religious views, but it does not impose any particular view, educates about all religions, but it does not promote or denigrate religion, informs students about various beliefs but it does not seek to conform students to any particular belief (Haynes & Thomas 2000:75–76).

#### **4.1. Developing teaching methods for educating PPETs on religious issues**

We propose a picture book *Little Monk’s Buddhawhich* is made up of eleven stories of Buddha’s births in animal form. These pleasant stories – which are simple and easy to understand – revolve around the importance of compassion and kindness, not only typical qualities of this religion but also civic values which can be applied to everyone and to any society. The other two picture books are about MaaSaraswati and MaaLaxmi, two Hindu goddesses. We decided to insert two female figures to give voice and space to a minority women’s religious representation and focus on their valuable contribution to religion. We introduce MaaSaraswati to investigate the role of symbolism in Hinduism and to investigate multicultural varieties of the English language and literature in the classroom, and MaaLaxmi to analyze what role the Hindu goddesses play for Hindu women and their ideas about equality between men and women, and to better understand the roots of today’s Hindu women’s subjection to men.

Through such teaching strategy based on these stories PPETs will be able to a) learn some relevant aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism with a crucial focus on English for Religious Purposes; b) make comparisons between the two faiths and Christianity; c) detect/learn/teach the interconnections between religion(s) and gender attributed to the communities under discussion.

To achieve a) PPETs are invited to use Google to search for basic information on Buddhism and Hinduism reading the section *Times* topics of the free on-line version of *New York Times*, which include news about both religions, commentary and archival articles, or to visit the *BBC* site where they can read about / translate / compare / contrast the religions under study. Then, PPETs are asked to read the texts by focusing on the variety of language (i.e. English for religious purposes), in general and on cultures/religious specific words and on code mixed phrases. PPETs can be also invited to consult glossaries on Buddhist and Hindu terms on the web to do an intralingual (English-English) and interlingual (English-Italian) translation of some passages taken from the stories. In such a task PPETs will test personally the best practice related to the inclusion of translation activities in their classroom.

PPETs can be also invited to read the books images which depict the Hindu Goddess (build, posture, clothing, setting, objects and animals around her) and for each element they should provide a list of her major symbols and their meanings (e.g. the can consul on-line glossaries on Hindu terms) and for each kind of blessing she gives her devotees, they should find the corresponding story included in the book and read it.

To achieve b) PPETs are introduced to Gautama Buddha's life story reading *Little Monk's Buddha* first chapter and the passage available on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/>. In so doing, they read / translate / compare / contrast the texts and implement their acquaintance of this great charismatic leader. The rest of the stories revolves around an animal and fosters a spiritual and moral value. PPETs can be encouraged to do a lot of activities, e.g. they can read the stories and identify the specific value raised and the animal associated to the value; compare and contrast the stories with Aesop fables available on the net in order to see whether the same animal share peculiarities similar to Buddha's incarnations (e.g. lion); or they compare/contrast the role of animals in the Bible and in the Gospel to better understand more about who Jesus and Buddha are, to be acquainted with how animals function in these texts, and how these images resonate and/or contrast with your perceptions of the same animals in your own context. Furthermore, by reading the two Goddesses' books PPETs will be able to be acquainted with Hindu rituals (e.g. Durga Puja), surf the internet to find further information about rituals and to find other similar ritual practices of other religions in order to understand diverse perspectives but similar features between religions.

To achieve c) PPETs can use picture books (e.g. Sheela's story in *MaaLaxmi* about her subjected condition towards men) together with contemporary articles (e.g. SharadaSugirtharajah's "Hinduism and feminism: some concerns", TahiraBasharat's "The Contemporary Hindu Women of India: An Overview" and Hanna Hedman's "Hindu Goddesses as role models for women? A qualitative study



of some class women's views on being a woman in the Hindu society") and the web (sites and videos) to develop and explore multiple points of view and expository writing styles around religions according to the genre chosen and to engage in critical discussion of complex religious issues concerning gender specifically. Such investigation can involve Hinduism from an issue-centred perspective (in particular, the role of women; marriage equality) and aims to produce a discussion about religions and womanhood.

## **5. Getting to Equal: Promoting Gender Equality through Children's Queer Literature**

As has long been recognized, literature has the power to touch the hearts and minds of readers of all ages (Chapman 1999). Many childhood teachers across the world feel they have adequate collections of picture books to meet their curriculum needs (Rowell 2007). Nonetheless, millions of children lack access to books characteristic of them and their families. Picture books depicting little boys whose favourite toy is a doll, or strong and independent little princesses who, notwithstanding their parents' pressure, do not want to get married or played the stereotypical roles of caretakers, mothers, and in need of being rescued by men; children in households headed by gays and lesbians or in families with homosexual members or friends are frequently missing from many preschool and primary classrooms as well as libraries. The lack of inclusive, diversity-friendly picture books means some children cannot see their own lives or the diversity of their family life reflected in books. Although most early childhood foreign language teachers are increasingly aware of the need to respond to the diversity among their students, sexual orientation is not always seen to be a part of that diversity (Colleary 1999). This is the reason why this last part underlines the importance of using gender-friendly literature to stimulate understandings of diversity in the classroom and respect for people from different gender identity and family composition.

Investigation on Queer children's books, i.e. on non-mainstream children's literature dealing with homoparental family models and gender variance issues, is a new research subject. The recent works by Sunderland &McGlashan (2011, 2012, 2013) pointed out some linguistic and visual features of an English corpus of Queer children's books. However, their precious contributions are not overtly correlated to an educational perspective and are limited to the English language. Such contributions could have a stronger impact when compared to similar works in other languages-cultures for exploring the respect for familiar and sexual otherness, especially in educational settings. L1, L2 and foreign language (FL) classrooms may thus contribute to the validation of all children's lives, notably of those who live in homoparental families or fear to express their sexuality, in order to erase homophobia and promote gender equity. This aim may be achieved by teachers who read queer stories and stimulate task-based activities in their language classroom. We believe that each family model and gender variance should be

equally accepted and explained, even in language classrooms, since each person is a precious part in any society.

With a specific reference to the literature on FL or second language (SL) teaching, queer issues, i.e. the awareness of plural sexual orientations and identities, seem to be disregarded, though some researches (Britzman 1995, Nelson 2002, 2004) showed that queer issues could merge with educational curricula. Practitioners in both ESL and EFL (Carscadden, Nelson, & Ward, 1992) have put forward practical suggestions for making curricula and materials more gay inclusive (as found in Nelson 1999). Despite these efforts, some colleagues are confused by the idea that lesbian or gay identities could play a relevant role in language learning both because gay-friendly teaching is of marginal importance, of interest only to a small minority of learners and teachers (gay ones), and even invasive, dealing with a controversial topic – i.e. (homo)sex - in a field in which it is neither relevant nor appropriate. Other colleagues find the notion of gay-friendly teaching appealing but declare to feel they lack the requisite support, resources, or know-how to proceed (see Jones, 1993, as cited in Snelbecker, 1994, p. 110), which is not surprising given the current lack of research on sexual identities in classroom practice.

This part joins such a heated debate by looking at how the topic of lesbian or gay identities comes up in ESL classes, what choices or challenges arise, and what strategies are helpful in dealing with them. In terms of classroom practice, the central focus has been developing what Britzman (1995) calls “pedagogies of inclusion”, which aim to introduce “authentic images of gays and lesbians” (p. 158) into curricula and materials. And an authentic image of a gay is the main character of the story we chose to investigate in this paper. We analyze the picture-book biography of a leading gay-rights supporter, Harvey Milk. Notwithstanding his almost short political career, Milk became an icon in San Francisco and a martyr in the gay community. In 2002, he was described as “the most famous and most significantly open LGBT official ever elected in the United States” (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002: 204). Anne Kronenberg, his last campaign manager, wrote of him: “What set Harvey apart from you or me was that he was a visionary. He imagined a righteous world inside his head and then he set about to create it for real, for all of us.” (Leyland 2002: 37). In 2009 President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Milk the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his contribution to the gay rights movement declaring “he fought discrimination with visionary courage and conviction.”

The story of Harvey Milk gives the opportunity to acknowledge that the domain of sexual identity may be important to a range of people for a range of reasons. As asserted by Nelson (1999) when speaking in general about the inclusion of queer issues in ESL curriculum, in particular the story of Harvey Milk has served as a good pretext to examine not only minoritarian/subordinate sexual identities but also the dominant one(s), to look at divergent ways of producing and “reading” sexual identities in various cultural contexts and discourses; to identify prevailing, competing, and changing cultural norms that pertain to sexual identities; and to explore problematic and positive aspects of this identity domain (Nelson 1999).

### **5.1. Developing teaching strategies for educating PPETs on gender issues**

Reading the Harvey Milk story PPETs will develop a deeper understanding towards Harvey Milk as a human being, his beliefs with regard to an egalitarian society, his contributions to LGBTQI community, and his doings for conquering equal rights for all people. We claim that including contributions of the LGBTQI community in educational instruction will lead to a further sensitivity to gender issues on the part of PPETs who will feel it is their duty to deal with such topics in the classroom, have an opportunity to make a difference at school and, consequently, to resist discriminatory practices and build empathetic communities.

As a preliminary teaching strategy, the terminology of LGTBTQI can be introduced to PPETs. They can be asked to work on terms such as intersex, queer, transgender, bisexual, lesbian and gay, find their definitions by using firstly paper and/or on line monolingual dictionaries and then the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, 450 million words, 1990-2012), the largest freely-available corpus of English. In such a way they will assess the transformation such terms undergone when they occur aseptically in the dictionary compared to their collocation in context. For example, using COCA and analyzing the keywords in context they will come across the use of “gay” in a demeaning way, such as “that’s so gay” (28 occurrences in COCA). At this point, they can be invited to discuss and identify possible root causes of using such word(s) with a negative connotation.

Next, focusing PPETs’ attention to Harvey Milk as a human being, his idea(1) of an egalitarian society, his activism for gaining equal rights for all people they can examine critically and experience for a while the perspective of one representative of LGTBTQI community. In particular, PPETs can summarize, analyze, evaluate important political fights in the Harvey Milk story (e.g. the California State Senator John Briggs’ bill that would ban gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools throughout California and Milk’s campaign against the bill) and draw comparisons that highlight the commonality that Milk shares with other historical leaders of movements in order to realize – and look forward to – all leaders and heroes should be recognized in our public education system – regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, or religion. In such a positive atmosphere, PPETs can identify burning issues (e.g. marriage and gay marriage) and suggest solutions to combat discriminatory practices and build empathetic communities.

### **6. Concluding Remarks**

Children's literature in this paper has shown helpful to examine the complexity of conflicts revolving around discriminatory acts based on race, class, religion and gender. While students reflect on life in the past, they can also make comparisons to the present. The horrors of racism, and the prejudice that produces such treatment; the ongoing conflicts predominantly motivated by religious extremism with peace with their hoped-for end, the gay and lesbian’s struggle for civil rights, all can be discussed in relation to the past and to the present. Fictional texts together with informational texts on people who changed history can be also

used to improve students' comprehension by building background knowledge, developing text-related vocabulary, and increasing motivation to explore the topic.

Furthermore, our teaching strategy based on intercultural dialogue recognizes that racial, ethnic, religious and sexual identities are not universal but are done in different ways in different cultural contexts, and it calls for a close look at how identities are produced through day-to-day interactions. Moreover, it encourages learners and teachers to question what may appear factual, and they allow for—and may even pedagogically exploit—multiple perspectives and diverging knowledges (Candlin, 1989; Kumara-vadivelu, 1994). Considering more than one cultural context helps specify rather than universalize what it means to identify (or be identified) as black, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, bisexual, lesbian, or straight.

The power and domination of some languages (in this case Italian and English) to determine identities should be challenged by developing cross-culturally responsive educational initiatives such as children's multi-ethnic literature to promote genuine acceptance and eliminate linguistic and cultural inequalities so that children from linguistic and cultural minorities can achieve success and self-esteem and join culture mainstream children to become English language learners of the twenty-first century, easily able to vault over linguistic and cultural barriers, free to know and identify oneself with others.

This article has argued that within ESL, learners, teachers, teacher educators, and material developers need to be able to refer to and discuss not just mainstream or majority culture but also racial, religious and sexual minorities as through these groups it is possible to analyze diverse cultural and discursive practices. Whether the intention is to critique these practices or to learn them (or a combination of the two), the task is to investigate the workings of language and culture in order to make them explicit.

In conclusion, we hope this article has evoked something of the rich potential that studying minorities in ESL offers to teaching theory and practice and spur language teachers to be dialogue-driven change activists, bridges between worlds, stimulating children to think beyond the stereotypical view of the world, acting as the vanguard of international communication and of intercultural understanding. Their task should be to stimulate learners to cross the border from their own way of speaking and living to others so that they, in this encounter with difference, can acquire linguistic and intercultural competencies for communicating effectively and appropriately not only in English, their second language and lingua franca of international communication, but also in their first language, as a lasting personal skill which they can apply to any encounter with “difference”.

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# THE EDUCATION REFORMS, PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGES IN BULGARIA

**Yanka Totseva**

*Abstract: The study attempts to present the implementation of social change through reforms and new legislation in Bulgarian education system. First we investigate the connections between theoretical research, scientific publications, teachers, education management on one hand, and the administrators in the Ministry of Education and policy makers on the other. Our second aim is to make an overview of the main topics of discussions related to social reforms in the education sector during the last 25 years.*

*Keywords: Educational reform; Public discussion; Social change; Innovation; Educational policy.*

## **Introduction**

The educational reforms in Bulgarian schools given the huge number of involved subjects have enjoyed great public interest and provoked a severe debate both in politics and also at different levels in the civil society. Attempts to change, reforms and innovate the educational system are reflected in the media – national and regional, print and digital, attempting to influence public opinion or urging the development of new views.

Object of the study is the dynamics of change in education legislation in the 1991-2013 periods.

Subject of the study is the public reaction to changes in laws and attempt to influence management decisions regarding school and participants – teachers and students.

The methodology of the study includes two phases:

- To analyze the changes of the two main laws of the school legislation – Education Act and the Act Level Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum;

- To analyze the public attention and media publications reflecting the actions of the Ministry of Education and the attitudes of students, teachers, parents, citizens and their organizations (nomination committees, NGOs, trade unions, parties and other formal and informal associations) to proposed or made changes.

The used methods are:

- Pedagogical thematic analysis of laws;
- Diachronic analysis of reforms in Bulgarian school;
- Problem analysis on rhetorical performances, information media posts, comments in forums, authors articles, press-conferences and video.

As primary sources for gathering empirical data on public reaction were used: On-line newspapers, websites of organizations and institutions, personal blogs, YouTube videos, internet forums, Facebook.



Key assumptions (supposition): A review of the short (just over 20 years) new history in the development of the Bulgarian state on the path of democracy and European values in secondary education shows two persistent trends:

1. Lack of continuity in education policy and
2. Resistance to change from interested parties.

### **1. Lack of continuity in education policies**

The change of political parties in government every four years leads to the emerging of a cyclical pattern in educational reforms: every new minister prepares a new Law of Education which provides new basis for a broad discussion. During the rest of the minister's term the new Law does not even reach the hall of the National Assembly, let alone ever been put into action.

For example, in the last 10 years there have been discussed three new laws governing the secondary education but none of them has been ever discussed and accepted by the National Assembly. The last government of the political party "GERB" (2009-2013) launched a program for the development of education, science and youth policy in the Republic of Bulgaria (2009 - 2013). [Program, 2009] Then two different teams from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science prepared two projects. The first began to work on a new law in 2009 which by the autumn of 2010 was published on the website of the Ministry for public comment. By unofficial data the team have received over 3000 comments and recommendations. In November the same year the work on the draft had to stop after the change of the Deputy Minister in charge of secondary education. Consequently a new draft of law had to be started. As a result in March 2011 "*Concept of basic principles and innovative moments in the new draft Law on pre-school and school education*" was published [Concept, 2011]. The draft law was published on the same website in October 2012. A separate text was published justifying the need for a new law. [Motives, 2012]

Since November 2012 there have been public debates at different levels – discussions in the Committee on Education in National Assembly and in schools, communities, professional organizations, print and digital media, television debates, meetings, petitions, comments in internet forums and many others.

### **2. Resistance to change**

There is a big power-distance in the Bulgarian culture in dimensions of Heert Hofstede's Model. It is collectivistic, with strong uncertainty avoidance and moderately feminine. Bulgarians are still afraid of the changes. [Davidkov, 2009] These features of national culture explain resistance – explicit or implicit in all innovations, changes and reforms that are being made in the field of public administration, and in particular in education.

#### **Mother tongue education in Bulgarian schools**

The trend of resistance to change in education legislation can be traced back to 1991 when a new Constitution was adopted which provides every Bulgarian

citizen with the right to study their mother tongue. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates that "Citizens who do not speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue have the right alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language to learn and use their own." [Constitution, 1991]

Decree № 183 of the Council of Ministers from 1994 to study mother tongue in municipal schools in the Republic of Bulgaria, states that: "Article 1. (1) Pupils whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, can learn it from Grade I to VIII in municipal schools within the prescribed curriculum with hours of free elective subjects. [Decree, 1994] Studying of mother tongue is limited to 4 hours in a weekly schedule.

The Education Act (Amended of 1998), states: "Students for whom Bulgarian is not their mother tongue, besides the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language have the right to study their mother tongue in municipal schools under the protection and control of the state." [Education Act, 1991]

This created a legal prerequisite for the study of Hebrew, Turkish, Romani and Armenian languages across the eligible school year, which is regulated by Article 15 (3) (Amended - SG. 95 2002): Compulsory eligible training includes learning mother tongue and religion in Act Level of Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum. [Act Level, 1999]

In elementary school mother tongue is taught in compulsory optional training, and in secondary – as a free elective. The Ministry of Education and Science has approved curricula that are taught in mother tongue, and they are published on the website. Workload ranges from 2 to 4 hours per week. Although there are curricula to study mother tongues from I to VIII Grade approved by the ministry, at present there are no textbooks in mother tongue. All this gives grounds to assert that the language policy in the Bulgarian school focuses on learning the official language and neglects native languages.

The opportunity to study mother tongues becomes a painful topic in the first years after the change to democracy. In different parts of the country meetings in support of this possibility were set up by Turkish-speaking communities. These provoked counter meetings organized by nationalists arguing that the Bulgarian school should adopt and teach the official Bulgarian language only. The political party "Movement for Rights and Freedoms" (DPS), which is perceived as a defender and conductor of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria clearly supported the opportunity to study mother tongue at school.

In 2012, the subject again came to the fore in connection with the statements of representatives of the same party regarding the need to change the electoral character of the mother tongue and its introduction as a compulsory subject. "During the discussion of the Law for school and pre-school education, which GERB note as mine, Lyutvi Mestan (then deputy leader of MRF) said: "Movement for Rights and Freedoms" will not support it because the problem of mother tongue education in schools is still in the fields of speculation. He stressed that the quality of educational services is much reduced, and therefore reduces the number of children who want to learn their mother tongue." [Antonov, 2012]

In support of the proposed evolution change two Turkish NGOs – Federation "Justice Bulgaria" and Shumen Association "House of Culture" began a campaign for introducing the obligatory study of Turkish in Bulgarian schools. [Myumyun, 2013]

On April 6, 2013 in the regional on-line newspaper "Sliven Today and Tomorrow" publishes an incorrect, provocative and unsigned article, which is taken from another site, published by an anonymous author, called "Four hours "mother tongue" – Turkish, Hebrew, Armenian, Gypsy." [Four hours, 2013] The reviews of the comments on the forums on both sites are the two extremes with negative comments far more numerous than the positive ones. The article "Mother tongue and "patriotism" in Bulgarian" appears on the same date. The author correctly explains the situation and attempts to cool the passions and to clarify that there is no threat to Bulgarian children to be forced to learn Turkish – something that appeared as a shared concern in the public domain. [Spasova, 2013]

In "The Absurd dispute about mother tongue" Yavor Dachkov defends the position that the right to learn mother tongue is within the Law and the rights enshrined in the Bulgarian Constitution. [Dachkov, 2013] At the same time a Facebook page was created – "I am against the mother tongue other than Bulgarian." Until August 6, 2013 it was liked by 252 users. [Facebook page, 2013]

Another journalist took part in the debate with his comment "The Great danger" – mother tongue" [Boyadziev, 2013] which as well generated a large number of comments online. The newspaper "Capital Daily" published "For Turkish in school." This article reflects the objective situation and warns of provocations. There are many comments after the online publication – both positive and negative. [Yordanova, 2013]

Publications on the topic may be found also in personal blogs. Martina Lakova in her blog says that she does not mind learning the Turkish language. [Lakova, 2013] Most of the comments after the post, however, are negative and the authors do not share her understanding.

### **Required exams**

In 1998 the Education Act re-introduces state matriculation. The legislature provides for them to be taken by students in order to complete their secondary education in 2003.

This change in the Education Act creates huge resistance in students who are directly affected (born in 1984) and their parents. Much of the population joins to their disagreement. In 2001 series of meetings were organized by affected students and their parents. The newspaper "Capital" on 1th of December 2001 publishes: "Matriculation return. Protest "wave" started from the sea and crashed in Ministry of Education and Science" [Mature, 2001]

Students due to graduate in 2003 prepare strikes against exams. They manage to collect over 70 000 signatures against the "ongoing reforms and uncertainty in secondary education". In a special statement to National Assembly and The Ministry of Education future graduates present their wish to complete their

secondary education upon the curricula in with that have been adopted. As a result of the public pressure in February 2002 Ministry proposes to hold two instead of three required exams as civic education exam was abandoned. [Two instead of three]

In April 2002, a national meeting was organized. It featured representatives from the Ministry of Education, students, teachers and parents, who discussed the problems. As a result it was decided to postpone the implementation of matriculation exams.

In 2006 the Ministry of Education orders Sociological Agency "Alpha Research" to perform a study in order to identify the attitudes of parents towards the matriculation exams and the "Strategy for the development of school education". "The results show that ... about 60% of parents support the introduction of mandatory exams, but at the same time, half of them believe that the education system is not yet ready for them. 34-36% of these are actually strongly against children to hold standardized exams. Only 14-16% of parents believe that these exams should become part of the entry requirements for universities." [Dimitrova, 2006]

Resistance continued in 2008 as the student organization "Call for education" sent a list of arguments against matriculation exams to the Ministry of Education. [Dimitrov, 2008]

In August 2010 the newspaper "Sega" again raises the issue on the agenda with the article: "Businesses require matriculation exams in mathematics." After the article has many comments for and against. [Businesses, 2010]

### **Teachers' strike**

A national teachers' strike took place in 2007. It began on September 24 – a week after the beginning of the school year and lasted 30 school days. According to the Ministry of Education 28% of schools and 21% of teachers participated in the strike. Two big meetings were held in Sofia as one was allegedly attended by 75 000 people. Polly Rangelova (teacher and an active blogger) published on September 29 a "Report of the teaching protest in Sofia" with many pictures and text to them. [Rangelova, 2007]

The website of "teachers-innovators" raised an online discussion on different topics related to the teachers' strike and the current situation. The participants were primarily teachers. They shared their problems, feelings and experiences setting. [Teacher strike, 2007]

In his personal website called "Comments" D. Bozhilov publishes its position on the topic: "Teachers' strike – against moral reality" and "An almost unbelievable, very true and very shocking story" by A. Grancharov. [Bozhilov, 2007] Both issues reflect the two main points of view– for and against the strike. Large number of comments follows both articles.

A conclusion that can be drawn after reviewing the comments and forums is that parents generally did not support the strike because they are concerned about missed school time. On the topic of teachers' demands for increased wages once

again, society was divided and opinions were extreme – from full support to a total denial of the teachers' demands for wage increases.

### **Draft Law on Pre-school and School education**

The public discussion of the Draft Law began in 2012, culminated in January 2013 and continued in February and March. The proposed change that caused the largest public response is related to Article 8 (1) which stipulates that "Pre-school education is compulsory from the school year that is starting in the year in which a child comes to an age of four." [Draft Law, 2012] The sharp negative reaction is in two directions – first: the age; and second: the replacement of "preschool preparation" with "preschool education". The most ardent supporter of the idea was Deputy-Minister of Education Damyanova, who "commented to the complete opposition of parents' organizations to the introduction of compulsory preschool for 4-year-olds: "This is a measure enshrined in the law and a provision which we hold very much in terms of the socialization of children. There is no way for children to socialize, learn to work as a team when they are home-schooled." [Press Conference Damyanova, 2013]

Over 20 civil and parental organizations sent an "Open letter to the government regarding the compulsory education for the 4-year-olds" and disclose this in a press conference. [Press Conference, 2012] The newspaper "Monitor" reflects parental position in the article "For and against compulsory education for the 4-year-olds. Parents want the right to choose". [For and against, 2012] The newspaper "Sega" published an article "An upcoming parental revolt against compulsory education for the 4-year-olds. Ministry of Education believes that upbringing in the family prevents the children from socializing" [Hristova & Stoyanova, 2012], in which two journalists represent the positions of the Ministry of Education and the parent organizations. The comments after the article are entirely against the innovation, as the arguments are multidirectional, but generally positive towards assessing the role of the family as a major factor in the upbringing of children of preschool age.

In December 2012 The Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church expressed its opinion against compulsory education for the 4-year-olds, stating that "The Law for pre-school education improperly deprive parents of their right to provide, and choose the kind of upbringing and education for their children according to their philosophical, religious and educational beliefs." [Synod, 2012]

At the same time one of the Teachers' Union shows a positive attitude. A letter sent to the media and signed by the President of the organization says that "Syndicate "Education" full-heartedly supports the compulsory coverage of the four year olds children to go to school, as set out in the Law for pre-school and school education." [The Union, 2012] Most of the comments after the publication on the website of "teachers-innovators" are negative.

In December, the "National network for parental involvement in the educational process" [Press Conference: Mandatory, 2012] organized a series of protest meetings in Sofia, Pleven and several other towns.

Prior a debate on the Draft Law in the National Assembly the Syndicate of Bulgarian teachers expressed a favorable opinion towards it. "Many of the parents who oppose compulsory education of the four years olds children go against certain policies out of stubbornness", said the President of the Syndicate of Bulgarian teachers to Information Agency "Focus". [Press Conference, Takeva, 2013]

On January 18, 2013 the National Assembly discussed Article 8. "Before the vote the majority rejects the proposal by members of "Movement for rights and freedoms" Imamov and Hamid that preschool education for the 4-year-olds should not compulsory but a choice the parents make for their children. Article 8 was adopted with the votes of members of GERB, "Ataka" and four independent members. According to the opposition at the age of four it is not a matter of education, but only of upbringing and preparation ...The Education Minister, who was in the hall never took the floor to defend the project. Following the vote the "Blue" political coalition announced that they would ask the president to exercise his right of veto on Art. 8 introducing compulsory education for the 4-year-olds." [Markaryan, 01. 2013] This article reflects the debate in the National Assembly and presents some of the arguments of the speakers. All comments afterwards were negative.

Parents expressed their disapproval of the idea of the compulsory nature of the article and the term "education." After the decision, between January 16 and January 19 there were over 40 articles published by national and regional online digital media. Most of the media allow comments. The majority of the comments were negative. About 20 people gathered in front of the Presidency with a request for the President Plevneliev to veto the adopted amendments to the pre-school and school education. Parents submitted a petition request to cancel the compulsory school education for the 4-year-olds. [Mothers, 2013]

The dissatisfaction of parents continues in February. [Markaryan, 02. 2013] A demonstration was held on February 19 in front of the Presidency. 50 organizations came together requesting a veto on the change by the President. It was initiated by the National Network of Parents Association for the protection of the civil rights and freedoms of parents and children and the promotion of civic engagement of families to the texts. Parents were convinced that there was no public need, no public debate and no public support. Their arguments were in their Statement. [Statement, 2013]

Since the political party GERB's government resigned on February 20 and the National Assembly was dissolved the Law was not adopted. In late May, members of political party GERB resubmitted the Law. The new Minister of Education Klisarova got involved in the debate on a TV show in August 2013 where she said that she would make a complete review of two of the most controversial decisions of the previous government, "the 4-year-olds children will not go to school, they are not ready for it, and let them play." She explains that the new government would focus on improving school education for 5 and 6 year olds and motivates this decision with the fact that there is not enough places for 4-year-olds in the compulsory kindergartens, and the government does not have the money for it." [4-year-olds, 2013]

In an interview published in the newspaper "Trud" from August 2013 Vanya Dobreva – Chairman of the Committee on Education in National Assembly commented on the text for the introduction of compulsory education for the 4-year-olds. She said: "I use "education" because the Draft itself includes the term "preschool education". Education is different from "upbringing" and "preparation". In the first case a learning process is presumed, and in the second - the creation of skills. I am against compulsory education and pre-school process for the 4-year-olds ... Generally compulsory is characteristic of totalitarian societies that deny rights, educate in a matrix principle, etc. Democratic society does not act that way. It guarantees the right of choice. As far as minorities are concerned, the system should be stimulating rather than obligating and punishing them." [Petkova, 2013]

### **Main conclusions**

1. Diachronic analysis shows that there are inconsistencies in the policies for secondary education reform, which are reinforced by the lack of public consensus on their usefulness, social value and efficiency.

2. Education legislation is created within the Ministry of Education and external experts have the final word.

3. There is a cycle of 4 years (one term of government), within which a new law of education is prepared and it cannot be adopted by the National Assembly.

4. Public discussions at the end of the last century were passing mainly through television but in the last few years the share of online digital discussions is growing, consisting of comments after articles in digital newspapers, forums and in social networks.

5. Although politicians express their willingness to publicly discuss the changes in education legislation, the majority of their decisions are taken independently of the reviews submitted by citizens, education experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations concerned with education and children.

6. For the last twenty years no proposed change in the law was met without resistance.

7. In all problematic issues participants are strongly polarized depending on their personal and corporate interests. The most vivid examples are the two strikes – against matriculation exams and the Teachers' strike. In the first case students, their parents and the wider community were all against the implementation of the article of the law adopted which was based on European priorities and practices, especially the long-term benefits of taking state exams. In the Teachers' strike against them was the government as well as large number of parents. Teachers' unions were unable to meet their demands or to provoke a positive dialogue.

8. Every social change meets resistance due to the specifics of the Bulgarian culture, which has a strong avoidance of differences, but also due to the inability of the authorities to create the conditions for broad public discussion in which to engage experts and politicians to argue convincingly the need for change and to identify long-term and short-term benefits as well as possible negative effects.

The results of the analyzes and conclusions allow us to say that the hypothesis for lack of continuity in the educational policies and the resistance towards change on the part of stakeholders were convincingly proved by many arguments and facts. On the other hand a global conclusion can be made that an educational reform can succeed if there are positive attitudes formed and agreed upon by all stakeholders and actors in the civil society. Undoubtedly, the Bulgarian school is in need of legal prerequisites for its optimization and innovation, but they will not happen until the change gets support from inside and outside. Also most conducive to the formation of public opinion among large groups of people in recent years are digital media and social networks. Their influence can no longer be ignored by those in power, and should be used for the purposes of information and communication campaigns in support of education reform, legislation and innovation in educational practices. Opinions and recommendations by teachers, educational managers and experts have to be appreciated and to be a base for agreement on the issue of the importance of education to achieve national prosperity and receiving international recognition in the scale of European education.

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# TEXTS ARE A-CHANGING, ARE TIMES CATCHING UP? ON THE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN DISCOURSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN MACEDONIA

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*Abstract: By using discourse analysis as main analytic tool, the paper examines the competing conceptualizations of social change as manifested through the texts produced by the Macedonian Government, civil society organizations and Macedonian citizens, with focus paid on changes within the education discourse in Macedonia. In so doing, it tries to elaborate how power relations and power abuse both structure and determine the discourse with its adherent representations, roles and relations.*

*Keywords: Social change; Discourse Analysis; Ideology; Power abuse; Education; External testing.*

## Introduction

Social change is a complex phenomenon overflowed with different theoretisations and popular understandings which at times are neither compatible nor aware of each other. Social theory for example, examines it in relation to its triggering mechanisms, structural determinants, processes and directions<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, social actors, groups and institutions, not possessing the epistemological discourse as their semiotic resource, rely on different signifying sources and perceive social change in a different manner, which leads them, being led by different political motives, to discuss and evaluate social changes differently.

Against this discrepancy, the paper examines the divergent discourses on social change as manifested through the texts produced by the Macedonian Government, civil society organizations and Macedonian citizens, with a focus on changes within the education discourse. In so doing, it uses a theoretical framework which includes social theory and some of its useful concepts, but relies mostly on Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as linguistically framed studies of society which offer a more appropriate methodology for the primarily linguistic nature of the data analyzed.

## Sociological theories of social change

Within sociological research, some of the re-occurring concepts related to social change are: contradictions (Marx, Eder), differentiation (Smith, Spenser,

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<sup>2</sup> Haferkamp, Hans. and Smelser, Neil J. "Introduction." *Social Change and Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 4-5. Print.

Durkheim, Marx), rationalisation (Weber), integration, conflict (Eder, Smelser and Eisensdtat) and internationalisation (Marx, Lenin, Smelser).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Marx sees changes as arising from contradictions and conflicts, based on differentiation of economic and social positions. On the other hand, Weber sees rationalisation as the guiding principle of labour division that brought unprecedented societal changes<sup>4</sup>. On a different note, Eder<sup>5</sup> speaks of contradiction as underlying both differentiation and rationalization, and also as a mechanism that initiates or continues communication, which in turn initiates a sequence of change<sup>6</sup>. The idea relates to Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the process of understanding of social change, whereby changes are related to language use as a form of both discursive and social practice. Therefore, it is highly important to study language in this context, as DA and CDA do.

### **Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### *DA as theory of social change*

Developing a linguistic model for studying social change, Fairclough<sup>7</sup> asserts that language changes both reflect and initiate social and institutional changes at large. In this respect, he identifies: a) changes in the discursive events and b) changes in the societal order of discourse. The latter are guided by three broad tendencies: democratization, which reduces and eliminates overt power markers of asymmetry, commodification, by which reconceptualisation and restructuring of certain social domains in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption is achieved.<sup>8</sup> Commodification is additionally explained as an “application of means-end rationality to discourse which makes it more bureaucratic”,<sup>9</sup> and which is achievable by the third tendency – technologisation of discourse. Here, “instrumental rationality is applied in the reshaping of discursive practices in order to improve performativity”.<sup>10</sup> This tendency may be interpreted

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<sup>3</sup> All summarized in Haferkamp, H. and Smelser, N. J. (Eds). *Social Change and Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 1-12. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Weber, Max. “Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology”. G. Roth and W. Claus (Eds). Berkley: University of California Press, 1978. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Eder, Klaus. “Contradictions and social evolution: A theory of the social evolution of modernity.” *Social Change and Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 320-349. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Eder, Klaus. “Contradictions and social evolution: A theory of the social evolution of modernity.” *Social Change and Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 323. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992: 2007. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Although not explicitly stated by Fairclough, the Weberian legacy in this idea of treating bureaucracy as particular case of goal oriented rationality imposed on organisation is more than evident.

<sup>10</sup> Fairclough, N. “Global Capitalism and critical awareness of language”. *The Discourse Reader*. Oxon: Routledge, 2006: 152. Print.

as serving the ends of reproducing dominance and unequal power relations in society. In this respect, it is CDA's seminal role to carry out research aimed at exposing such power imbalance, and thus bringing about change.

#### *CDA as practice of social change*

CDA studies structure relationships of dominance and power as manifested by language in order to produce enlightenment and emancipation<sup>11</sup> and also to “contribute to specific social changes in favour of the dominated groups”<sup>12</sup>. In this way, CDA is a problem oriented, multidisciplinary study the results of which should be accessible to experts in form of mediation, consultancy, education of professionals<sup>13</sup> etc., and should be applied with the goal of changing social and discursive practices<sup>14</sup>. In the light of these ideas, this study analyzes the discursive constructions of change in a specific social domain: education. The general intention is to present it critically in the light of CDA ideas of power imbalance.

#### **Discourse model**

To pursue this end, I will use a model of discourse based on those developed by Norman Fairclough<sup>15</sup> and Teun van Dijk<sup>16</sup>. Fairclough postulates a three-dimensional model of discourse functioning as “text – discursive event – social practice” unity. The dimensions correspond to three levels of analysis: linguistic, discursive, and social, each of which analyses different, yet related aspects of discourse. One of the units of the linguistic analysis is the clause structure, where Fairclough maintains a Hallidayian multifunctional perspective observing that the choice a producer makes in creating and relating clauses reflects his signification of social relations, identities, and knowledge. The analysis of these structures then is an ideological analysis aimed at discovering how texts favour some relationships, some process types and agents and how all this relates to reproduction or challenge of power relations.

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<sup>11</sup> Wodak, Ruth. “What is CDA about? A summary of its history, important concepts and its developments”. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, 2001: 2-10. Print

<sup>12</sup> van Dijk, T.A. “Discourse and Power”. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008: 7. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 23-27.

<sup>14</sup> Wodak, Ruth. “What is CDA about? A summary of its history, important concepts and its developments”. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, 2001: 7. Print.

<sup>15</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. Print.

<sup>16</sup> van Dijk, T. A. “The study of discourse”. *Discourse as structure and process*, Volume 1. London: SAGE Publications, 1997: 1-34. Print.; “Critical discourse analysis”. *The Handbook of discourse analysis*. Blackwell Publishers, 2001: 352-371. Print.; “Discourse and Power”. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. Print.

The discursive analysis of the text-in-interaction is focused on aspects of text production, distribution and consumption in terms of: force of utterance, coherence, and intertextuality. Intertextuality is in turn broken into two other categories: manifest intertextuality, and constitutive intertextuality or interdiscursivity, whereby textual heterogeneity is due not to the presence of other texts but of the conventions typical of other genres, discourses, styles, and activity types<sup>17</sup>.

The social analysis of discourse largely focuses on two questions: a) an account and analysis of the social matrix (the wider network of social practices, relations, and structures constituting the general context of the discursive practice), and b) questions of ideology and hegemony. In respect of the first, it is discourse analytical task to specify the nature of the social practice of which the discursive practice is a part. Holding a firm Gramscian position, Fairclough maintains that hegemony as power is never fully achieved, and hence it is an object of continuous struggle, in which ideologies are significations of reality that reproduce or challenge power relations and domination. In this respect, the analytical task is to account for the ideological, hegemonic effects of discourse upon social identities, relations, and knowledge<sup>18</sup>.

It is exactly in this respect that van Dijk's model diverges mostly from Fairclough's, apart from the socio-cognitive nature of van Dijk's model. Thus, instead of hegemonic power struggle, van Dijk<sup>19</sup> emphasises the cases of power abuse and domination, which is a more readily applicable case at hand.

Another applicable aspect of van Dijk's model is his differentiation between local context (setting of the event, participants and their communicative and social roles and intentions) and global context (relation of the communicative event to the organisational and institutional actions and procedures). This division provides the frames for two levels of social analysis: a micro-level, concerned with social situations, action, actors, and societal structures<sup>20</sup>, and a macro-level, concerned with power abuse and domination.

Drawing on the two models, I shall do a three-part analysis (linguistic, discursive and social) with somewhat less attention paid to the linguistic analysis, and more focus paid to the intertextual and interdiscursive text production, how these textual processes relate to other institutional and social process (social matrix in Fairclough's and global context in van Dijk's term), and how these texts reproduce and/or challenge dominant ideology.

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<sup>17</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992:85. Print.

<sup>18</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992:86-96. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Van Dijk, T.A. "Discourse and Power". Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. Print.

<sup>20</sup> Van Dijk, T.A. "Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity". *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, 2001: 115-118. Print.

## Data analysis

This model will be applied to three sets of empirical data: a) informal interviews focused on the text(s) about “changes in education”, and b) a news agency interview with the Macedonian Prime Minister in which he speaks about changes in many social domains, among which the newly introduced education reform of “external testing”, and c) the objections to this disciplinarian technique of examination<sup>21</sup> by the Youth Education Forum (YEF), as manifested in new releases, articles, analysis and a petition.

### *Interview summary*

Informal interviews with professors, teachers and parents were carried out to examine the selected topic of “changes in education”. The interview focused on ideas and arguments people use to construct the “changes in education” text and to explore to what other texts, and what other processes and structures it is related to and what ideology was recognized as operating underneath.

During the interview, many of the interviewees pointed to the poor quality of pupils’ knowledge, which was explicated by lack of parental care, by reduced scope and depth of learning materials, unmotivated/ing teachers, and the dying habit of reading due to computerisation. All these factors were also used as intertextual building blocks in the accounts of the disastrous level of school education, evidenced among other things, by the low thirty percent baccalaureate passing margin. This devastating practice was related to the paradox involved in the Macedonian Law on obligatory high school education<sup>22</sup> which, by stating that secondary education is obligatory, aims at increasing the number of educated citizens.

Some concerns in regard to the worsening quality of high education are: lowered University admission requirements, a shift from knowledge based to skill tailored curricula, lowered level of extracurricular knowledge, lower assessment criteria, and alike. These phenomena were commented on in the light of various causes and underlying ideologies. For example, the increased number of universities was perceived as a capitalistic rat race for profit, a goal unattainable without the supporting ideology of the importance of education as a key to both personal and societal success. This goal cannot be accomplished without the underlying process of what Fairclough terms “commodification of the educational discourse”<sup>23</sup>, whereby education becomes a manufacturing industry producing “knowledgeable” and “capable” employment subjects. Thus, students become hireable products of education and means of production at once, in the process that

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison”, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.

<sup>22</sup> MON. “Law on secondary education”. Ministry of Education of RM. Web. August 2013. <<http://www.mon.gov.mk/images/pdf/>>

<sup>23</sup> Fairclough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992:207-215. Print.

transforms them into a commodity exchangeable between the educational and the labour segment. In this discursive process of producing subjects, the educational institutions have also transformed themselves into competing industries, which in order to survive have minimised the demands on the students, thus affecting the quality of the process of education.

Among the many concerns expressed by interviewees was the recently introduced reform of “external testing” for elementary and high school pupils, who in addition to the grades gained throughout the year were tested on two randomly picked subjects with tests created and administered by the Ministry of Education, the general goal of the process being to identify discrepancies in quality assessment and thus ensuring a better quality of education. The reform was executed in an unsatisfactory manner, which caused lava of citizens’ reactions that were defied by the Government. One such attempt is an interview with the Prime minister who is both talking of his position on the issue at hand and is also representative of Government’s discourse on change in general.

*To test or not to test: A hegemonic struggle*

The Prime Minister opens the appropriately titled interview “Knowledge, skills and standard will bring progress”<sup>24</sup>, explaining the phrase “increasing standards” as a process of passing laws and reforms<sup>25</sup> that will solve citizens’ problems like: more professional administration, independent judicial system, and more just-full school assessment, brought about in this case by the reform of external testing, the purpose of which, according to the minister is “putting an end to the era “of an unjust full assessment started in the 90s by the nouveau-riches.”<sup>26</sup>

The reforms according to the prime minister aim to reinstall a system which values professional development and knowledge acquisition as an indispensable instrument of personal and societal progress. As exemplified by him, “it is a rule in all professions that whoever wants to make progress must learn”, and “our success can only depend on knowledge and skills.”

Some of the most recognisable linguistic features of the recurrent theme “education is everything” present in the interview is the use of phrases like “standards are changing”, “the testing will only become better”, “it is a rule that whoever wants to succeed”, “professional improvement will bring progress”; when change is being spoken about.

By way of multifunctional clause analysis one may see that the absence of agency makes the propositions somewhat factual, as if the clauses were objective testimonials of ongoing, unalterable reality. The only identifiable agents of the actions are non-human subjects like laws (ex: “laws and decisions that will make

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<sup>24</sup> Gruevski, Nikola. Netpress. “The knowledge, the skills and the standards will bring progress”, 7 Jul. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://www.netpress.com.mk/mk/>>

<sup>25</sup> Although the Prime Minister does not speak of changes per se, it may be assumed that reforms, as processes of institutionalised changes inevitably cause changes in both social and discursive practice.

<sup>26</sup> By way of contextual implication, one can easily infer the referent of the phrase being the Government’s political adversary – the Social Democratic Party.



people feel happier and solve their problems”, “the law states that any trained employee will be financially rewarded” or “the new law forbids employment without prior testing”, etc.), implying the very impartial role of the Government as a bureaucratic institution facilitating the necessary ongoing process of (positive) change. On the other hand, personal clauses like “in the process, we attracted many enemies”, “we faced serious critique”, and “we are aware that the reforms demand victims”, ideationally create a military metaphoric frame whereby the opposition is represented as irrational (“they hysterically screamed”), and the Government as the true Samaritans who suffered ungrounded criticism for their well intended, righteous decisions.

Ideologically speaking, the whole discourse on education is based on the belief in the paramount socio-economic significance of education. The idea seems problematic because on the one hand, there is a general determination towards the increase of quality of education, on the other there is a general dissatisfaction with the quality of education. Also, there is the initiative to make education obligatory and available to everyone, thus building a knowledge society, and yet pupils graduate with minimal outcome and knowledge. These are just some of the discrepancies between the Government discourse on education and people’s discourse. I shall finish the examination of discrepancies by analysing the reaction to what the Government has termed as an irreversible<sup>27</sup> reform of “external testing” and which has been uneasily accepted by citizens, whose views are well informed and voiced by the Youth Educational Forum (YEF).

Basically, the YEF tries to negotiate an improvement of the project, by suggesting that the Government should not officialise the testing results and should announce it as a pilot project. This, YEF believes, will alleviate students from fear and pressure, and teachers from the “imposed institutional clench”<sup>28</sup>. The reasons underlying such suggestion are threefold: technical failure, breaking legal framework and problematic goals of the process.<sup>29</sup>

Commenting the two goals of the testing as stated by the Ministry of Education – to enable students to see what they really know, and to provide teachers with opportunities to test the objectivity of their assessment<sup>30</sup> – YEF observes that in the absence of logical and explicit explanation of how the goals so articulated would contribute to the quality of the educational process, the only

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<sup>27</sup> The repetitive use of the attribute is a signal of Government” uncompromising position on the issue.

<sup>28</sup> In this phrasing by YEF makes it is hard to miss the disciplinarian nature of the process in Foucault’s sense, as he in *Discipline and Punishment* succinctly explains that the technique of examination which combines surveillance and sanction is a normative one that enables classification and punishment, in which the display of power is related to establishing the truth (Foucault, 1995, pp.184-194).

<sup>29</sup> All arguments expounded can be found on [www.mof.mk](http://www.mof.mk) and [www.radiomof.mk](http://www.radiomof.mk), the specific documents used are listed in the reference list.

<sup>30</sup> State Testing Center. “Handbook for External Testing”. Retrieved from Nova Makedonija, online news. Web. August 2013. <<http://novamakedonija.com.mk/dodatoci/eksterno>>

discernible goal seems to be assessing the degree of objectivity of the teaching staff<sup>31</sup>.

In terms of breaking the legal frames, YEF points to several weaknesses, such as: breaking legislative procedures, situations undefined by the law, the law being discriminatory towards teachers of obligatory subjects, etc. The objections based on technical failure in execution are more numerous, some of them being: tests spilled into public, computer system failure, test questions that were not part of the curriculum, and so on<sup>32</sup>.

In this respect YEF has suggested number of legal steps that citizens could undertake like: addressing the issues to the institutions in charge, boycotting the issuance of grade certificates, and organising a petition which demands announcing the testing a pilot project<sup>33</sup>. Prior to and at the time of the petition, the Minister of Education, Mr. Spiro Ristovski, has continuously repeated the Government's uncompromising rejection of the idea on the grounds of the project's success<sup>34</sup>, but has also officially declared that he would be "open for suggestions only in respect to overcoming technical challenges"<sup>35</sup>. The petition was signed by little over than twenty five thousand citizens, but to no avail, since according to the minister, "it is a late reaction"<sup>36</sup>.

### Some concluding remarks

What can be observed from this obvious situation of power imbalance is that although the reform is seen as change potential on both sides, the consequences of its implementation are differently evaluated and represented by the two competing discourses and their underlying ideologies. It is clear that YEF's discourse openly challenges the Government's power-based representation of change as happening and as positive, by various discursive means (news releases, conferences, analysis, petition), but it has failed in its critically discursive attempts to undermine and change the totalitarian hegemony of the Government. One speculative interpretation of the failure may be sought in the larger context (the social matrix in Fairclough terms) that illustrates the total power abuse on the part of the

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<sup>31</sup> YEF. "Analysis and recommendations: External testing in the schools in Macedonia." YEF. Jun. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://www.mof.mk/mofmk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/.pdf>>

<sup>32</sup> Radio MOF. "10 Absurds of the external testing". Jun. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://www.radiomof.mk/>>

<sup>33</sup> Radio MOF "Survey: Would you acknowledge a imperfect external testing?" July 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://www.radiomof.mk/>>

<sup>34</sup> Ristovski, Spiro. "The external testing was successful, hope next year will be even more successful", interview with the Minister of Education, Mr. Spiro Ristovski, *Tocka*. 28 Jun. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://tocka.com.mk/1/>>

<sup>35</sup> Makfax. "The external testing will not be a pilot project", Jul. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://makfax.com.mk/313426/>>

<sup>36</sup> A1 ON. "Ministry of Education: MOF was late with the reaction", 23 Jul. 2013. Web. August 2013. <<http://a1on.mk/wordpress/archives/>>.

Government, examples of which are endless: the costly and scandalous project “Skopje 2014”, the passing of the annual budget with no parliamentary debate, the control over almost all media, to name but a few.

In this respect, one can easily see that there is a strong bureaucratic tendency to impose institutional changes that are argumentatively challenged, but one can also easily observe the overall contradictions, textual, interactional, and ideological. And yet, these contradictions are somewhat different than what theory states since they bear neither (positive) change potential, nor initiate communication.

Finally, the whole discourse of social change, one example of which is education, is perplexed with signs of difference – positive evaluation versus negative, the big vision of future progress versus problematic details like technical obstacles, depending on the text producers. More importantly, it is overwhelmed with signs of power abuse like naturalizing the ideology of education’s importance. At times, this dominant voice is being challenged, proving that discourse on change is also a site of struggle, although not always successful. What seems problematic in these opposing representations is that reality cannot follow two texts, and since their synthesis has practically shown to be impossible, it remains to be discursively and politically contested regardless of the disheartening circumstances.

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