# NEW TENDENCIES TOWARDS IDENTITY RECONFIGURATION BETWEEN INTERCULTURALISM AND TRANSCULTURALISM

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Nowadays, due to the impact of information technologies, humanity has begun a movement of transcendence from cultural-axiological space and of the intercultural relations into other, far more extensive and harder to reach spheres. Under these circumstances, new identities are built, and the methodologies ensuing from interculturalism may be inefficient and incomplete to represent this new transcultural identity. Therefore, we need a new paradigm, which can propose different methodological research and which can explain the spiritual-value dimension.

*Keywords: culture, multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturality, self-image, auto-images, hetero-images.*

**NOI TENDINȚE SPRE RECONFIGURAREA IDENTITĂȚII**
**ÎNTRE INTERCULTURALISM ȘI TRANSCULTURALISM**
În prezent, datorită impactului tehnologiilor informaționale, omenirea a început o mișcare de transcendere a spațiului cultural-axiologic și a legăturilor interculturale în alte sfere mult mai extinse și mai dificil palpabil. În aceste împrejurări se dejoacă noi constructe identitare, unde metodologiile venite din interculturalitate vor putea să redea ineficient și chiar lacunar această nouă indentitate transculturală. De aici survine o necesitate de schimbare de paradigmă atât în dimensiunea metodologică de cercetare, cât și în cea spiritual-valorică.

*Cuvinte-cheie: cultură, multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism, imagine de sine, autoimagini, heteroimagini.*

## Introduction

The contemporary society, in the state we know today, is characterised by hyper-modern, hyper-technological and hyper-competitive rhythms. As a result, there are mutations not only at the visible level of the economic and social relations but at the level of psychological and the spiritual dimensions as well, particularly affecting the self-structuring processes and the emotional state of the individual.

These changes have already affected people's way of being and of feeling both under the pressure of the accelerating life rhythms and under the influence of the weakening borders between the real and virtual realities. According to Bauman, a process of self-dissolution is taking place in the society that has become "liquid" [1]. The individual living in this liquid society is well informed about the new cultural events, scientific discoveries, politics. Also, this individual has to continually remodel himself, adapt quickly and continuously rebuild himself as an identity. Today, with accessible rapid means of transportation at our disposal, time and distance are shorter. The electronic media (e.g. the Internet) provides us with an instantaneous contact with the other. However, even with these new scientific developments a question remains: has our possibility for rapid physical and virtual travel really put us in contact with the other and fostered an understanding of the other [1, p. 76]?

The recognition that modern societies are no longer monolithic, that the imaginary social space has mushroomed into a multitude of identities has propelled us into a realization that we are in an era where interculturality, transculturalism and the eventual prospect of identifying a cosmopolitan citizenship can become a reality. However, we still remain circumscribed by our Little Italies, our China Towns etc., which beyond the pleasures of experiencing culinary delights, nevertheless create a self-illusion that we have attained a level of cultural awareness of the other [2]. Thus, further on we want to show the possible present structures of the human condition and the possible direction of its future change.

## Culture as an element of humanity

To have a deeper understanding of the topic of "multi" and "transculturality", we need to start by defining a most primary concept – *culture*. According to E. Sapir *"culture is an organization of a phenomenon, of acts, objects, ideas, attitudes, values and use of the symbols.* Redfield speaks of **culture** as *"an organized body of conventional understandings manifest in art and artifact, which, persisting through tradition, characterizes*

*the group* [3]. Alternatively, in a contemporary variant, culture is defined as "*a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common*" [4, p.53]. Sometimes "culture" is also used to describe specific practices within a subgroup of a society, a subculture, or a counterculture. In cultural anthropology, the ideology and analytical stance of cultural relativism holds that cultures cannot easily be objectively ranked or evaluated because any evaluation is necessarily situated within the value system of a given culture. It is significant that culture forms a symbolic field, and through this area people become aware of their existence. It is very important to understand these needs and to satisfy them because they help to reveal what drives human behaviour and thus what makes people want to achieve certain things in life. This is a very important moment without which we can't exist and fulfil our life. Another important principle is that we create inter-connections, symbiotic interrelation with others and, as a result, we create one mega-structure – this is culture.

At the core of each culture there is a half-rigid structure; through this structure, people establish connections and intersections among them – Cultural Basic Self-Image[1] [5, 6]. The elements of this metaphysical structure form an order and an equilibrium in relations between people like: gender, occupation, age, social position, etc. The basic cultural identity is a rigid construction, the value hierarchy is well-established in culture and represents human orientation directions from a certain culture which are: characteristics, abilities, values, rituals, behaviours, according to which we can deduce what is a real Romanian, Bulgarian or French like.

People in different cultures have strikingly different construals of the self, of others, and of the interdependence of two members of a cultural group. These construals can influence, and in many cases, determine the very nature of individual experience, including cognition, emotion, and motivation. Once people form groups – whether at home, socially or at work – they begin creating their own group culture based on the behaviours they expect, reinforce and reward [7].

**Interculturality as an environment of cultural interrelation**

When two cultures are at an intersection for hundreds of years, the basic cultural structures form within them certain areas of the other cultural self. As a consequence of this interaction, a series of interpretative processes has formed for a long time, and as a result of this interaction a hetero-image representation is built. As a result of these multiple contacts such as conflicts, tensions, economic changes, political agreements, a basic, second level, cultural image is formed, which is overtaken by the second cultural subject when they relate to the subject from the first culture. Finally, an ample modelling process of some intercultural spaces is created. The more intersections are formed between these cultures, the more possibilities to be understood and interpret each other[2] [8].

Of course, not all people in a basic cultural self can be open to dialogue or, at least, able to understand the other culture. Only a small part of the society is able to be sensitive to the other self-cultural. These people form the intercultural identity. While the existing bi-dimensional model defines integration as the simultaneous acceptance of different cultures as they are, the present study stresses the importance of reinterpreting components from both cultures as a basis for integration. The main characteristics of the Intercultural Identity are [9, p.75-76]:
- Intercultural Subjects can effectively communicate across cultures;
- They are able to move from particular to universal;
- These subjects have affinity with the unfamiliar and appreciate difference;
- They are open to alternatives;

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[1] The term Basic Self-Image has a broad functionality in social psychology, and in particular in ethnopsychology. Baron defines Self-cultural as a tripartite structure: physical body, socially defined identity (roles and statutes), and personal knowledge about oneself. The key element – Basic Self Image, is the basis of many contemporary constructions to explain certain behavioral constants, attitudes, emotional phenomena, etc. psychologically as well as culturally: self-consciousness, self-focus, objective self-awareness, self-esteem, self-handicapping, self-efficacy, self-improvement, self-monitoring, etc. In 1980 Otto Klineberg initiated a research into intercultural psychology that aimed to make a comparison between collectivist and individualist cultures. In this study he introduces the concept of Basic Self Image, which becomes the basis for perceiving the central structure of "cultural specimen".

[2] This interrelation between "myself" and the "other" is much discussed in the field of Imagology – a new dimension of Ethno-psychology. "The other" is like "a mirror for me", and at the same time, I am a mirror to the other (two elements are detached from this passage: hetero-cultural self-image (a social representation of the member of another cultural group) and self-image of a cultural self (a social representation of myself in front of the other).

– They can transcend the narrow concept concerns of the group;

– They can move beyond the tribal to the universal needs of humanity.

In 1977, Peter Adler published a paper called 'Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Cultural and Multicultural Man' which explores the rise of a new in-between cultural subject. He conceptualised – in gendered terms – a new personality type emerging in the Western societies. This new man [sic] developed certain attributes and characteristics that allowed him to be a facilitator and initiator of cross-cultural contacts. "Interculturalism presents a new set of policies and political programmes. It seeks to replace multiculturalism and provide a new paradigm for thinking about race and diversity" [10].

### Multiculturalism as a form of social engineering

As a philosophy, multiculturalism began as part of the pragmatism movement at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, then as political and cultural pluralism at the turn of the twentieth. It was partly in response to a new wave of the European imperialism in sub-Saharan Africa and the massive immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans to the United States and Latin America. According to Peter Adler, "*interculturalism is about changing mindsets by creating new opportunities across cultures to support intercultural activity and it's about thinking, planning and acting interculturally*" [10].

The theory of multiculturalism starts from the premise – there are no pure cultures, but there is an intercultural mix. A member of a cultural space that wants to change, plus another member with the same wish, both are placed into an immediate proximity, when their common elements become a fundamental for their communication, as a result of their inter-relations, they will be able to initiate a family. The family assumes children, the children will be involved into the educational process in which they will develop basic social-cultural elements for that society. As a consequence, a new open-minded, more adaptive society is born [11].

For the multicultural strategy to apply, the following conditions are needed to be supplied. The first condition is: subjects of multicultural identity have to know who they are, what they stand for, how they have experienced society, and what roles they play in the society where they cohabit. The second one is: a multicultural consciousness will be developed, based on the understanding of social structure, of system of privileges and social oppression. They are able to see the world from the perspectives of others, especially the cultural diversity. The third condition is: subjects will show interest and make the effort in learning about individual differences in social context for all people, including the culturally diverse and socially marginalised. With a multicultural identity as the foundation and understanding of the system of oppression and privilege, the citizen will be able to manage the intersection of other cultural identities when he or she will work in the cultural diversity.

In the contemporary context, it is recognised that the multicultural strategy has failed, because the dialogue between cultures is too superficial from this point of view. Criticism of multiculturalism questions the ideal of the maintenance of distinct ethnic cultures within a country. Multiculturalism is a particular subject of debate in certain European nations that are associated with the idea of a single nation within their country. Critics of multiculturalism may argue against cultural integration of different ethnic and cultural groups to the existing laws and values of the country. The main critics of multiculturalism [12]:

– Implementation of multiculturalism principles initiated by aggressive policies which don't relate with the complex processes of intercultural interactions.

– The new immigrants have a low level of adaptation to the host culture.

– New latent superiority-inferiority tensions come out and generate conflicts and resistance between the cultural majority and the immigrant's culture.

– As a result of these tensions, generated by serious contrasts within the social memory, spaces of segregation (the main culture rejects the values of minor cultures) and separation (the minor culture doesn't accept the main values and these people isolate themselves) appear [2, p. 82].

### Transculturality as a new state of identity

Present time dictates new identity structures, different from cultural, intercultural or multicultural point of view. Transculturation is a term coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. Transculturation encompasses more than transition from one culture to another; it does not consist merely of acquiring another culture (acculturation) or of losing or uprooting a previous culture (deculturation). Rather, it merges these concepts and additionally carries the idea

of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena (neoculturation). Transculturality is now understood differently from its conceptual past. Today, we can understand transculturality not as a co-operation between two elements (two cultures), but three elements: globalisation, interculturality and virtual reality (as broadly as possible).

Lamberto Tassinari (director of the transcultural magazine *Vice Versa* in Montreal), suggests that we can imagine and envision transculturalism as a new form of humanism, based on the idea of relinquishing the strong traditional identities and cultures which in many cases were products of imperialistic empires, interspersed with dogmatic religious values. Contrary to multiculturalism, which most experiences have shown re-enforces boundaries based on past cultural heritages, transculturalism is based on the breaking down of boundaries. In many ways transculturalism, by proposing a new humanism of the recognition of the other, based on a culture of "métissage", is in opposition to the singular traditional cultures that have evolved from the nation-state [13, p. 85-86].

B. Malinowski [14] said the following about transculturality: "It is a process in which both parts (two cultures) of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, not even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, *original and independent…*it is an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, *both contributing their share*, and *both co-operating* to bring about a new reality of civilization."

The main characteristics of transculturality are [15, p.25-26]:

− Transculturalism is deeply suspicious of itself and of all statements. Its claim to knowledge is always redoubtable, self-reflexive, and self-critical;
− Transculturalism emphasizes on the problems of contemporary culture in terms of relationships, meaning-making, and power formation and the transitory nature of culture as well as its power to transform. The culture, in transcultural perception, is just a segment individual's progress;
− Transculturalism is interested in dissonance, tension, and instability as it is with the stabilizing effects of social conjunction, communalism, and organization. It is interested in the disintegration of groups, cultures, and power;
− Transculturalism seeks to illuminate the various gradients of culture and the ways in which social groups *create* and *distribute* their meanings.

Transcultural Identity employs a sum of features: high level of accommodation and individualisation, sceptical and cynical view, transcendence into nothing, supra-cultural creativity, "Outsideness", in the "middle" of many cultures, without rigid values and principles, internet-dependent individual, floating behind a group's boundaries, open space of "no culture", etc.

The place and the role that modern people have in the social structure are the way to represent their individuality. During their life, this modern self often changes their residence, their place of work, can change their friends and even their family and is connected with the virtual reality and the possibilities this reality can offer. Individuals, as well as their identity, are less dependent on the stability of the social characteristics like politics, education, social problems, etc. In the transcultural society, the human individual atomizes themselves, their identity no longer depends on their social position and status, but on the possibility of accommodation and reaction to the life challenges. Their behavioural patterns are continuously reviewed and questioned. The transcultural society makes the person unable to find themselves in the field of application of sustainable social practices.[3]

**Conclusions**

The contemporary society generates short-term cultural models and the group culture and its subcultures prevail. People identify themselves with their temporary interests, hobbies and personal achievements. The problem of transcultural identity is closely connected to the problem of the individualisation. The subject and their identity are in a continuous construction, in which this subject is forced to find an individual form of expression.

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

Self-fulfilment in the contemporary culture and society is extremely diverse and doesn't provide people with certain responses. The meaning of the individualisation and trans-culturality concepts is to liberate the person from the inherited predeterminations of the social-cultural roles. Thus, the process of individualisation we find in transculturality makes the subject detach easily from the space, time, things, values and principles. Self-identity in transculturality is associated with individual choices. The universal direction of human orientation does not work today. This subject can be anywhere and at the same time nowhere.

There is no culture, there is no point in which we can anchor our identity because identity is fluid and if we believe that such an identity exists, then we become a prisoner to our culture. Culture becomes a floating signifier.

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