

OUT OF THE BLIND ALLEY. OR NOT

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*Abstract. This article takes up some pressing contemporary issues: phenomena such as globalization, migration and the possibility of integrating the migrants are discussed; the problem of new learner needs and intercultural competences is also addressed. These topics are assimilated within the wider framework of critical theories dealing with national identity, the nation-state and trauma theories. In the rapidly changing European context, new strategies for social transformation have to be devised and long-term projects have to be re-examined and re-evaluated in order to ensure the existence of a common future.*

*Keywords: globalization, migration, integration, national identity, the nation-state*

**Introduction**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century faced countless problems and social issues; what the biggest challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be is yet ambiguous, obscured by the dislocation of several pillars modern society was relying on in favour of new postmodern staples and rushed by the boisterous and unstoppable upsurge of technology. What is certain, though, is the fact that the phenomenon of globalization is already playing a central role when it comes to redefining the nation states and re-evaluating national identity and will continue to trigger refinements in several other areas, such as human values, changing learning needs, developing intercultural competences, and dealing with migration and trauma, all of these and a few others having already led to a reconfigured understanding of reality.

**Contemporary issues**

The issue of globalization, deeply grounded in the last decades of the previous century, huddled together the media, conferences, presentations, papers, speakers, and many more, commonly rejoicing in the benefits of a global village, better and quick access to information, and a newly found social but also cultural freedom for Eastern European countries. From an economic point of view there are some major points that have been listed on the positive side of globalization: developing countries can enjoy Western markets and people can now freely roam in search for the best market opportunities for their labour skills; multi-national corporations are creating local job opportunities at the same time bringing an infusion of foreign capital and breeding the prospect of new technologies being locally instilled, which leads to economic boom and a rise in the general standard of living of the population; last but not least, the much-talked-about but less-acted-on ecological problems of the world can now be dealt with at a global level.

Soon enough the downsides became obvious and the gains appeared less definite: the access to information is still limited, depending on the geographic area; the same job is paid differently in different countries (even five times less or more) and multinationals are allowed by most countries to transfer their gains and avoid local taxes; while becoming ever stronger and more influential, the latter show no concern for local environment and national resources, thus overthrowing the basic tenet of globalization that of conjoint democracy. The utilization of the latest technologies can only go as far as the developing countries are able to absorb

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them, this meaning the governments' full-hearted acquiescence to embrace new sciences, innovation and the development of new industries. In the meantime, without economic performance, political stability and continuity in its monetary affairs, a country has to face the migration of its youth and highly trained people in search for better opportunities and the mirage of Western high income. It also looks as if, when it comes to saving the world from ecological disasters, a lot of ink has been spent in agreements but no unified global concurrence has been reached so far and decisions have been mostly locally implemented.

All in all, globalization seems lopsided when sharing in the economic profit and democratically providing prosperity. The rich are even richer, the poor stay poor. Speaking from an American standpoint, Forbes contributor Mike Collins quotes The UN Development Program which reveals that the rich, representing 20 percent of the world's population consume 86 percent of its resources while the poor 80 percent's share is of only 14 percent. "Globalization," Collins says, "is an economic tsunami that is sweeping the planet." [It] "is like being overwhelmed by a snow avalanche. You can't stop it – you can only swim in the snow and hope to stay on top ... We can't stop globalization but there are many policies and strategies we can use to make it more equitable" (2015).

It would be deceptive to close the subject of the economic effects of globalization without referring to the phenomenon of immigration/emigration whose predicament has become explosive nowadays. Originally less was said about the mood of confusion and the dangers of migration, issues which have surfaced for a while now and have become unavoidable. The desire to move from the East and South to the West is not at all surprising, nevertheless, "little is more contentious," says Wolf (2015) who classifies migration as being "the touchstone of rightwing populism." Immigrant workers' willingness to sell their skills for lower payment lays a lot of pressure upon the working force of the host countries, just as the increasing number of people in the same area can burden public services and social welfare schemes, the latter finding it problematic to handle job losses and deficits.

The migration flow increased from 4.7 to 5.0 million between 2007 and 2016 (OECD, 2018) and, together with it, organized crime and people trafficking also boosted. Ruspini (2017) reveals three trends of international migration. First, the percentage of female migrants has known a rapid growth lately, mainly due to the fact that women, earlier migrating to reunite their families, are nowadays "revisiting the 'breadwinner model.'" In several countries gender relations have changed, thus women move to take up jobs in the traditionally considered female areas, such as health or services, areas in which the host countries are faced with increasing demands. Second, there is no longer a clear distinction between countries of origin, transit and destination of migratory flows. "Today almost every country and different regions are covering all three roles: for example, North Africa is being transformed from "region of origin" to region of "transit" and "destination" and the same goes for Eastern Europe." And third, permanent migration has been replaced by temporary migration. There is a "transition from the traditional model of migration with initial displacement followed by final return home [or not] to several migrations over a lifetime, often in different countries, with periodic returns home." This situation is favoured by the developments in transport and communication and has as a result the phenomena of "transnationalism," that is "being here and there" and of "hybrid identities and multiple citizenship." The measures to be taken in order to smoothen the process will have to do, in Ruspini's opinion, with changes in the "integration" policies both locally and nationwide.

Integration is a thorny problem. Not only is it complex but also long-standing and so far it has been accomplished with less than promising results, illustrated by the frequent frictions with the local populations. Actually, there are no examples of successful integration

when speaking about the millions arriving from Muslim countries since, as Prime-Minister Orban pointed out, they consider their "principles, culture and religious beliefs" as being stronger and more valuable than those of the European populations, which consequently they are not willing to accept. "If people having set themselves conflicting aims, find themselves in the same social order and country, the result will not be integration but chaos" (Orban, 2017, author's transl.). While Orban wonders whether Europe will continue to belong to Europeans, Wolf openly speaks against subsequent growths in the size of populations which, even in case of prosperous countries such as Denmark, "would not increase the standard of living of its citizens. But it would impose sizeable investment and congestion costs." The argument might not be in the number of immigrants but in their characteristics, he argues. Those in favour of large-scale immigration claim that, since the rate of natural increase in populations has constantly been falling in high-income countries, the immigrants will soon be the only source of population increase. Besides, they are "younger, cheaper, better motivated and valuably different" (Wolf, 2015). Conflicting views underline the fact that young people will age, and there are disadvantages to diversity. Massive migration may influence not only the economy and the infrastructure but will also set its print on the cultures and sets of values of the hosting countries, influencing them in complex ways. There is no doubt that cultural mingling enlarges horizons and builds tolerance for accepting the other. Cultural diversity enriches society and consequently the individual. Multi-racial projects bring people together culturally in view of contributing new approaches and fresh ideas. But cultural identity can be constructed only under the circumstances of stable ethnic composition of the population. In consequence, it is difficult to find a satisfying solution and it seems "perfectly reasonable for countries to argue that their own citizens always come first" (Wolf, 2015).

In the postmodern world, Howarth posits, the almost exclusive concern regarding identity "denies the materiality of the subject" and economic and political problems are reduced to cultural issues, the latter apprehended in terms of "language, ideas and textual representation rather than social practices and institutions" (2013: 226). This reification of language, its separation from objective realities, such as the ones above, appear as inconsistent with the concept of fluid identities and the obliteration of any sense of self or subjectivity under overwhelming differences "so that identity dissolves into difference and otherness" and the "subject becomes as infinitely malleable as the identity that he or she constructs," everything engulfed in an "endless sea of particularities and differences that share nothing in common" (227). Howarth criticizes such theories as being misleading and proposes a shift from *identity* towards *identification* with emphasis on the "contingent, constructed, and relational character of identity/difference, which in turn exposes productive political and ethical paradoxes and dilemmas" (227).

The concept of identity is paradoxical and profoundly ambivalent: while the individual can freely construct his own life and express his own values, this very capacity leaves him open to being entrapped by categories and labels of others' invention. Quoting Foucault's "disciplinary regimes of power that name and classify, that enable individuation only as they imprison," Weir emphasizes the duality of our postmodern identities, both sources and ends of freedom, on the one hand, and "shackles that imprison us," (2013: 2) on the other. Her shift of interest from identity in terms of categories to identity in terms of relationships may be the missing link connecting postmodern theory with socio-economic and political reality. The central question becomes "to whom and to what am I importantly connected?"(2) and the answer will include desires, personal stories, affiliations and histories. Weir sees such questions as both individual and collective since they incorporate us into collectivities, even while facing conflicts and differences: "The stories we tell each other, our

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desires for and with each other, our difficult and fraught relations to each other, are what hold us together, as individuals and collectives." The nature of our connections are relevant for the question of our freedom: "How do the relationships that hold us together constitute not just shackles but sources of freedom?"(5). The individual identifies with personal or collective ideals, but what he needs to do is to re-organize his identifications so that the "the freedoms associated with them, open up and require us to confront conflict, difficulty, and complexity: these are the risks of connection" (151).

These are also the benefits of living within what Anderson signals as the elements of a nation: "limited" borders, geographically stable in spite of being elastic, "sovereignty," a feature specific to the modern nation-states as opposed to the previous highly internationalized regimes, and being a "community," the feeling of belonging beyond and above smaller factions, social classes, religious groups or political parties. Here too, membership takes priority and is the energizing force that allows for sacrifices to be made in the name of patriotism. "Indeed nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson, 1991: 3), prompted by the widespread diffusion of printing and the printed press which allowed each and every individual to be aware of events occurring other than locally and, consequently, the development of national languages. Nation-states developed and strengthened, nationalism replacing religion in different places and, Anderson wrote more than twenty-five years ago, not yet undermined by multi-national organizations and firms that sprang up like mushrooms in the wake of globalization. For Anderson, a nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6) since it is not based on anything objective, its substance being retrospectively erected on an elite's ideology. For Keucheyan (2014), the nation-state comes up against two problematics. First, that of "nation and nationalism," where nationalism is understood as an ideology that kept its vigour since the French Revolution and "accompanies the division of the world into nations." The second problematic is that of "the state" and "concerns the form and function of the modern state in its relationship, for example, with capitalism civil society or geopolitics" (109). Modern nations having assumed the form of states, the two problematics are interlinked with the exception of diasporas ("nations without a state") and never has there been such a close connection between them as now, with the emergence of "state or quasi-state 'supra-national' forms, such as the European Union" (109).

In today's context Europe is as affected culturally as it is socially and economically. "As a major instructional objective nowadays, culture is seen as a promoter of intercultural competence in view of a better understanding of one's own but also of others' national identity" (Coşer, 2017: 25). How the values we bestow on further generations have shifted under the circumstances of adolescents recreating themselves on-line, "heterogeneous global communities" and "a reconfigured understanding of reality" and to what extent "small c" culture replaces Culture with a capital "C" make not the point here. What cannot be neglected though, when speaking about education, are the changes in the learner needs in public schools of mixed races. This affects not only immigrants' children but also an ever greater number of parents who raise multiracial children. Arteaga speaks about the major role parents have in securing racial identity, all the more so as it appears to be directly and "positively correlated with overall psychological well-being." Research shows that, unfortunately, "parents of multiracial individuals overwhelmingly neglect to address racial and ethnic issues both within and outside of the family home" (2012). Consequently the roles teachers need to assume are enhanced. Already in 1997, Byram underlined these changes when speaking about skills, attitudes and values which are involved in intercultural competence and what is the relevant importance of each:

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Teachers cannot be neutral on cultural issues since they respond to other cultures as human beings and not just as language teachers. They need therefore to consider how their own stereotypes and prejudices may influence their teaching subconsciously, and what the effects of this may be on learners. They also need to reflect upon how they respond to and challenge their learners' prejudices not only as teachers but also as human beings subconsciously influenced by their experience of otherness.

The same year, Byram developed his model and classified competences into *attitudes*, *knowledge* and *skills* (1997: 34-38). By attitudes he means integrating one's own experience and assuming a self-reflective disposition when working with migrants or minorities while being able to correctly appraise the benefits of international migration both for the individual and the society. Knowledge means understanding the contemporary historical perspective that originated the phenomenon of global migration, its "push and pull" factors, its social consequences for sending and host societies, generally learning about integration and possible discrimination in a "work-life perspective." Skills involve the capacity to identify the different perceptions about migration, societies' responses to the current phenomena, as well as the ability to construct and deconstruct one's own perspective in an attempt to correctly grasp reality and differentiate it from perceptions.

Critics are mapping new territories for critical thinking and theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One such new area of manifestation is *Trauma and Testimony Criticism* since one of its purposes is to read history differently in relation to trauma and to observe the singularity and the material effects of exceptional historic circumstances. Racial identity formation, as Balaev shows, conceptualizes the connection between trauma as the individual experiences it versus the way a group experiences it. This theory states that "an essentialist concept of identity" is "organized around a notion of the intergenerational sharing of loss and suffering because the actual event is transmitted to descendants of a common racial, ethnic, national, religious class, or gender group" (Balaev, 2012: 15). Quoting Bouson, Balaev gives as an example the "learned cultural shame" that has become an "inherent quality of contemporary black identity" as a result of the traumatic experience of slavery, the historical absence of civic rights and "white racist practices." Collective memories in Bouson's theory are "intergenerationally transmitted" and "haunt" specifically and only the categories of people whose previous generations had once been traumatically affected by them. National loss and historical absence are at the basis of articulation of a "fixed identity that is created by transhistorical trauma" (14-15). This is a traditional model of trauma based on the "universally shared (neural-hormonal) response to traumatic experience" and contradicts Piers' model, also quoted by Balaev (34-5), which relies on the influence of "character in the individual's frame of reference" as a highly significant factor when it comes to recalling a traumatic event. In this pluralistic model, identity is seen as a "a dynamic system informed by multiple stimuli, including social spheres of action" and the emphasis rests on the way the individual relates to the traumatic event in the moment of recall, reaction which is informed by the individual's present needs, his character traits and the actual social context. To what extent and to whom today's history will prove traumatic remains to be seen.

Keucheyan offers three worksites as strategies for social transformation. First of all, one has to be equipped with a "description, however approximate, of the world in which one is intervening" (2014: 252). A faithful representation is made impossible by the rapid developments nowadays which do not allow for fix coordinates. Every strategy develops in close interaction with social and political movements, therefore, the gap between thinkers and movements must be bridged while getting organized in view of the historical opportunities offered by present challenges.

A second worksite has to involve the ecological question. Political ecology, a young science, has not yet produced "its Marx." By this Keucheyan means that no general theory has yet been produced that would integrate into "one analytical movement its economic, political, cultural, geographic, epistemological, etc. dimensions" (254). On the other hand, no politically operative thought has yet been created either that would be embodied in real social and political movements which would constitute a radical ecology. Such thinking is imperative for the coming years. "It goes without saying that, to be effective, it will have to be something other than what is sold under this name in the electoral market in Europe and elsewhere..." (254).

A final worksite has to do with an increased autonomy of critical thinking in the "periphery" of the modern world. Keucheyan states that globalization has determined dissemination of critical theories throughout the world, theories which have been until recently the "monopoly" of the "old continent." Globalization of critical thinking now seems inseparable from its "Americanization" which arises one basic problem: the social and spatial isolation of American universities and their occupants from the rest of society, on account of their "elitist character." This situation renders difficult a true interaction between critical thinkers and present-day political and social movements.

Therefore what is required, is to "uncouple" the emerging globalization of critical thinking from its Americanization. "If a genuinely multi-polar order in the field of critical thinking is still far off, our map suggests that it may emerge in the decades or centuries to come" (255).

### **Conclusion**

One cannot prepare ahead for events that turn out to be traumatic in their after-effects. To what extent contemporary Europe will relate to this particular slice of history as a traumatic experience or will be able to cushion the blow of its changed composite ethnic structure the future will tell. Merkel has optimistically defended an open border policy and refugees rights while identifying 'asylum' as a possibility for the "next major European project": "If Europe fails on the question of refugees, then it won't be the Europe we wished for," "Germany is a strong country - we will manage," (<http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/01/>). Orban, supported by an increasing number of countries, asks for tighter control on movements around the European Union and sides with the preservation of national identity against what he calls the "Soros Project." In between them Romania seems to be in a stand-by position, neither traumatically affected, not entirely unharmed. Two proverbs apply to this situation and should better be considered in view of securing a future for this country, which has been challenged to great lengths since 1989. A Chinese proverb urges: "Before you prepare to improve the world, look around your own house three times," while an African Proverb commands: "Tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."

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