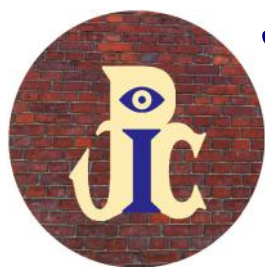


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LITERATURE

LORD VOLDEMORT – QUI EST-IL? À LA RECHERCHE DES LIENS ENTRE L'ALCHIMIE ET LA MAGIE DANS LA SAGA HARRY POTTER DE J.K. ROWLING

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***Abstract:** The objective of this article is to present the character of Lord Voldemort, the main antagonist of Harry Potter. In analyzing his past and his quest for immortality, the author of this study describes Lord Voldemort as a powerful and merciless black magician who uses alchemy and magic to become immortal. Through the presentation of the means he uses in his quest (among others objects like the Philosopher's Stone, Horcruxes and Deathly Hallows and magical animals like the unicorn and the Nagini snake), the author tries to answer the question whether Voldemort is both a black mage and an alchemist.*

***Keywords:** Harry Potter, Lord Voldemort, magic, alchemy, J.K. Rowling*

L'alchimie, mystérieuse et quasi miraculeuse, est une discipline remontant à la nuit des temps. Définie comme l'art de la transformation du plomb en or, elle préoccupait toujours les plus grands esprits de toutes les époques. Leur grande œuvre consistait à créer la pierre philosophale, connue aussi sous le nom de «pierre d'éternité» (Morel: 6). Cependant son but n'était pas uniquement la transformation de métaux non précieux en or, mais aussi elle devait pouvoir créer une potion magique qui rendrait immortel celui qui la boirait.

Les origines de l'alchimie et le terme qui la désigne, ils sont très souvent attribués au monde arabe. Ses adeptes sont rapidement considérés comme des «hommes mages» s'intéressant à «l'art maudit» et qui, en conséquence, sont pourchassés à l'époque de la Renaissance (Morel: 7). Bien qu'ils soient considérés comme les créateurs des bases de la chimie d'aujourd'hui, il existe aussi une tendance à les décrire comme des êtres cupides et présomptueux, obsédés par la richesse et l'immortalité.

Toutefois, la possibilité de posséder la clef de l'immortalité préoccupait non seulement l'esprit des alchimistes mais aussi l'esprit des magiciens. La magie, fréquemment liée au secret, à l'initiation, au divin est, en conséquence, souvent reliée à la alchimie.

D'après *l'Encyclopédie du fantastique*, l'histoire clandestine des alchimistes, une étymologie incertaine du mot lui-même, ainsi que le secret, le mystère et l'ombre qui l'entouraient et l'entourent toujours font que l'alchimie soit aujourd'hui un motif très répandu dans la littérature fantastique (6-10).

Dans *Harry Potter*, la saga «fantasy» écrite par Joanne Kathleen Rowling, c'est la magie qui joue un rôle primordial. Cependant, il est possible, selon nous, d'y retrouver les traces de l'alchimie. Il est donc valable de démontrer comment et à quel point sa présence influence le monde des sorciers inventé par l'auteure. Dans son cycle Rowling crée un monde de sorciers parallèle au nôtre où elle met en scène des éléments merveilleux destinés à émerveiller les lecteurs (Prince: 25). En s'inspirant des mythes et des légendes de différentes cultures, elle noue l'histoire d'un jeune garçon-sorcier Harry Potter qui fait, en même temps que le lecteur, les premiers pas dans le monde magique. Dès qu'il y entre, il apprend que sa vie est imprimée par la mort de ses parents, tués par un mage noir, Lord Voldemort. L'exploration de son personnage et de son histoire dévoile que Voldemort s'avère être un personnage unissant en soi l'alchimie et la magie. Il nous semble donc intéressant de le caractériser et de trouver la réponse à la question qui il est.

La quête de l'immortalité

Lord Voldemort, le principal antagoniste de Harry Potter, est un personnage maléfique tourmenté par le désir de devenir immortel, étant convaincu que seule l'immortalité démontrerait sa grandeur et sa puissance. L'avidité du pouvoir le pousse vers la magie noire et aux actes monstrueux inacceptables pour les autres adeptes de magie.

Voldemort éveille une si forte peur chez les sorciers qu'ils n'osent pas à utiliser son vrai nom et l'appellent: «Tu-Sais-Qui», «Celui-Dont-On-Ne-Doit-Pas-Prononcer-Le-Nom» ou même «Le Seigneur des Ténèbres». Au cours des aventures de Harry Potter, l'écrivaine britannique dévoile au lecteur que Voldemort, avant de devenir mage noir, s'appelait Tom Elvis Jedusor. Elle tisse son intrigue en révélant l'histoire de Tom Jedusor et les raisons pour lesquelles il est devenu Voldemort. Au fur et à mesure, nous obtenons l'image d'un personnage maléfique, hanté par le même désir que les alchimistes – trouver le

moyen de prolonger la vie. À la fin du quatrième tome de *Harry Potter*, Voldemort dévoile à ses partisans, les Mangemorts, qu'il n'a qu'un but: «vaincre la mort» (Rowling, «Coupe de feu»: 581).

Ayant cela en considération et en analysant sa quête de l'immortalité, il est facile de trouver certaines ressemblances entre ce personnage et l'archétype de l'alchimiste. Contrairement aux alchimistes qui se concentraient avant tout à trouver la pierre philosophale, Lord Voldemort cherche d'autres méthodes pour prolonger la vie – il se sert des animaux magiques, des Horcruxes et des Reliques de la Mort.

Dès son enfance, Tom Jedusor nourrit une haine profonde envers son père Moldu qui a abandonné sa mère-sorcière après avoir appris qu'elle était enceinte. À cause de la mort de sa mère et faute d'intérêt pour assumer son éducation de la part de son père, Tom a dû passer son enfance à l'orphelinat. Après avoir découvert ses capacités magiques et être devenu l'élève à Poudlard, il a été poussé par la volonté d'être le meilleur. À l'école, c'était un élève remarquable et, probablement, le plus brillant de tous les élèves. Il séduisait non seulement ses camarades, mais aussi des professeurs, notamment Horace Slughorn. Et puis:

il a disparu après avoir quitté le collège... Il a voyagé loin, traversé de nombreux pays... Puis il s'est plongé si profondément dans la magie noire, il a tant fréquenté les pires sorciers, et s'est livré à des expériences si maléfiques que lorsqu'il est réapparu sous les traits de Lord Voldemort, il était devenu impossible de le reconnaître. (Rowling, «Chambre des secrets»: 343).

Sa recherche fait penser aux alchimistes, des sages qui essaient de comprendre les ombres de la science, de l'alchimie en utilisant la méthode «obscurum per obscurius, ignotum per ignotius» ce que signifie: «aller vers l'obscur et l'inconnu par ce qui est plus obscur et inconnu encore.» (Morel: 7).

La recherche et, avant tout, les voyages lointains semblent être indispensables pour un alchimiste qui vise à explorer les profondeurs de la science, de l'inconnu et de l'inconscience. Rappelons le personnage de Zénon Ligre, à la fois philosophe, médecin et alchimiste, présenté par Marguerite Yourcenar dans *L'Œuvre au noir*, qui a obtenu son savoir au cours d'une vie errante. D'où la constatation que la recherche alchimique consiste non seulement à trouver la

méthode de la transmutation des métaux mais à transformer l'alchimiste lui-même. Cette théorie est présentée par Carl Gustav Jung. Dans son œuvre *Psychologie et Alchimie* (publié en français en 1952), Jung suppose que cette transmutation est possible à condition que l'alchimiste se transforme intérieurement. Il souligne que le processus alchimique de la transmutation n'est que l'image d'une expérience intérieure vécue par l'alchimiste. Pour lui, «le Grand Œuvre» – la fabrication de la pierre philosophale – se réalise non dans un laboratoire d'alchimie mais sur le plan psychique et spirituel (Jung: 291) Pourtant, l'alchimie psychologique de Jung n'a pas comme but la perfection, le pouvoir d'un être mais la plénitude, la complétude de son âme.

La tâche des alchimistes peut donc être comprise comme enrichissante et menant vers la sagesse. Par contre, la quête de Voldemort menant vers les obscurités de la magie inexplorée par d'autres sorciers, peut être perçue comme destructrice. Voldemort n'arrive ni à la complétude ni à la plénitude de son âme mais, tout au contraire, en la scindant, il approche la désintégration et la vacuité. En réalité, cette quête ne lui sert qu'à une seule chose: devenir le sorcier le plus puissant au monde. Il rejette ainsi la division entre le bien et le mal, ce qu'il souligne lors d'une des rencontres avec Harry Potter en disant qu': «il n'y a de bien ni de mal, il n'y a que le pouvoir, et ceux qui sont trop faibles pour le rechercher» (Rowling, «École des sorciers»: 294).

Pour arriver au pouvoir, il ne se limite pas à ses propres capacités, mais il se sert d'autres personnes, qui le suivent et qui sont ses partisans et disciples les plus fidèles: les Mangemorts. Il imprime sur leur bras la «marque des ténèbres» qui devient plus visible à mesure qu'il se rapproche et gagne en puissance. Ce symbole, représentant «une gigantesque tête de mort, composée de petites lumières semblables à des étoiles d'émeraude, avec un serpent qui sortait de la bouche, comme une langue» (Rowling, «Coup de feu»: 121), fait penser à la médiévale «marque du diable» que le diable, d'après les croyances chrétiennes, appose sur ses disciples.

C'est déjà à Poudlard qu'il s'entoure de ses disciples auxquels il dévoile son nouveau nom: Voldemort. À l'école, il commence aussi à rechercher les possibilités de devenir immortel. Dès qu'il trouve des informations concernant les Horcruxes, il en parle avec le professeur Horace Slughorn. C'est le professeur qui lui explique le principe de leur fonctionnement:

il s'agit de séparer son âme en deux (...) et d'en cacher une partie dans un objet, en dehors du corps. Ainsi, même si son corps est attaqué ou détruit, on ne peut pas mourir parce qu'un morceau de l'âme reste attaché à la vie terrestre sans avoir subi de dommage. (Rowling, «Prince de sang-mêlé»: 571).

Le jeune Tom Riddle demande au professeur Horace Slughorn que faire pour scinder l'âme plus d'une seule fois – il veut la fragmenter en sept morceaux, car il considère ce chiffre comme le plus puissant parmi tous les chiffres magiques. Remarquons que le chiffre sept occupe une place importante non seulement dans la saga de Rowling (qui d'ailleurs compte sept tomes), mais aussi dans l'alchimie. C'est un chiffre qui représente le pouvoir magique et qui joue un rôle important en alchimie: les alchimistes essayaient dans leurs travaux d'assembler les sept éléments planétaires. Voldemort s'est donc fié au pouvoir du chiffre sept lors de la création des Horcruxes pour protéger son âme contre la mort.

Les Horcruxes

Bien que le mot «horcruxe» ait été créé par Rowling, le concept d'Horcruxe est présent dans les mythes et légendes de différentes cultures. Dans *Le Rameau d'or*, James George Frazer en parle et énumère plusieurs exemples des «âmes extérieures» (Frazer: 874-888). Frazer retrouve des exemples de l'« âme extérieure », qui est créée afin de protéger la vie de son possesseur, dans les récits non seulement européens mais aussi asiatiques et africains.

Dans la saga de *Harry Potter*, Voldemort se sert de deux types d'Horcruxes: des objets d'une grande importance pour lui (son journal intime, la bague de son grand-père Elvis Gaunt, le médaillon de Serpentard, la coupe de Poufsouffle, le diadème de Serdaigle) et des êtres vivants (Nagini et, fortuitement, Harry Potter). Si les objets inanimés peuvent bien protéger l'âme, car il est facile de les cacher, un animal ou un être humain peut être exposé à différents dangers. Néanmoins, il faut souligner que Nagini est un animal magique et que Lord Voldemort n'a pas prévu de cacher l'un de ses Horcruxes dans le corps de Harry Potter.

Voldemort, comme d'autres héros de mythes et légendes, ne pense qu'à protéger son pouvoir et à l'immortaliser. Il est même prêt à tuer des innocents, à commettre un acte contre la nature. L'idée que la conception d'un Horcruxe exige une victime provient de la magie ancestrale: pour qu'un sort soit plus puissant, les anciens faisaient le sacrifice d'un animal pour utiliser après son sang durant leurs rituels.

D'ailleurs, Voldemort s'avère être inconscient des conséquences produites par la division de l'âme et, de plus, ne pense pas à la réintégrer. Frazer remarque la même tendance dans les récits qu'il a analysés: «À partir du moment où la sécurité de l'âme est assurée durant son absence, il n'y a aucune raison qu'elle ne reste pas absente pendant une durée indéterminée. De fait, un homme peut, pour assurer sa sécurité personnelle, souhaiter que son âme ne réintègre jamais son corps» (251).

Les animaux magiques

Voldemort n'est pas découragé par sa défaite face à Harry Potter, car grâce aux Horcruxes qu'il a créés, il ne meurt pas. Presque mort, il devient ombre et vapeur. Pour survivre, il boit le sang de licorne ou le venin de son grand serpent, Nagini, qui est à la fois l'un de ses Horcruxes. Le fait qu'il tue une licorne montre qu'il ne s'empêche de rien pour récupérer sa forme et ses capacités.

La licorne est une créature légendaire, très répandue dans les différentes mythologies. Carl Gustav Jung indique que cet animal est, entre autres, le symbole de l'énergie vitale (Jung 548-593). Probablement, en tenant compte de cet aspect, Rowling dote son sang d'un pouvoir régénérateur et considère son meurtre comme un fait impardonnable:

Tuer une licorne est une chose monstrueuse (...). Pour commettre un tel crime il faut n'avoir rien à perdre et tout à gagner. Le sang de licorne permet de survivre, même si on est sur le point de mourir, mais à un prix terrible. Car il faut tuer un être pur et sans défense pour sauver sa propre vie. Et dès l'instant où les lèvres touchent le sang, ce n'est plus qu'une demi-vie, une vie maudite. (Rowling, «École des sorciers»: 262-263).

Nagini, le serpent dont Voldemort boit le venin pour recouvrer ses forces, n'est pas non plus un animal ordinaire. Ses origines sont probablement royales. Dans les mythologies bouddhique et hindoue, *Naga* est un serpent quasi-divin qui a, parmi ses grands pouvoirs, des pouvoirs curatifs miraculeux. Dans la mythologie grecque, le serpent est un animal sacré qui s'enroule autour du bâton d'Asclépios, le dieu de la médecine. En outre, le serpent est symbole de l'univers et symbole de l'alchimie (Berthelot: 61). L'«ouroboros», c'est-à-dire le

serpent qui se mord la queue, symbolise le Grand Œuvre qui n'a ni commencement ni fin. Dans ses *Origines de l'alchimie* Marcelin Berthelot souligne que l'«ouoboros» dans les différentes cultures était:

envisagé comme le symbole d'une puissance supérieure; comme le signe de la matière humide, sans laquelle rien ne peut exister; comme l'âme du monde qui donne naissance à tout ce qui est. (...) Le serpent Ouroboros symbolisait donc les mêmes choses que l'œuf philosophique des alchimistes. (63)

Cependant, le sang de licorne et le venin de Nagini ne peuvent que maintenir en vie Lord Voldemort. C'est pour cela qu'il essaie d'abord de voler la pierre philosophale et puis, en n'y parvenant pas, il commence à rechercher d'autres moyens pour arriver au pouvoir.

Lapis philosophorum

Dans le cycle des Harry Potter, *lapis philosophorum* est une substance légendaire dotée de pouvoirs étonnants – elle rend possible la production de l'élixir de longue vie qui rend immortel celui qui le boit. D'après Rowling, il n'y en a qu'une qui existe aujourd'hui et c'est celle qui est l'œuvre de Nicolas Flamel (Rowling, «École des sorciers»: 224).

D'après les légendes, Flamel, d'ailleurs un personnage historique, était l'unique alchimiste qui a réussi à créer la pierre philosophale et à préparer l'élixir de vie. Dans le premier tome de la saga, Voldemort s'éloigne des alchimistes en ne respectant pas le processus des recherches alchimiques – il veut uniquement profiter de la pierre philosophale de Flamel. Il la désire pour récupérer ses forces et recréer son propre corps. Nicolas Flamel et son épouse Pernelle, qui ne ressemblent guère à Voldemort et n'ont pas peur de la mort, pour l'en empêcher, décident de détruire la Pierre.

Ainsi, Nicolas Flamel est présenté par Rowling comme un exemple d'un parfait alchimiste. C'est un sage équilibré qui n'est point orgueilleux et qui traite la mort comme une grande aventure (Rowling, «École des sorciers»: 300).

Les Reliques de la Mort

Au fur et à mesure que Voldemort regagne son corps et récupère ses forces, il cherche à nouveau les moyens de devenir le sorcier le plus puissant, capable de maîtriser la mort. Les Reliques de la Mort peuvent lui donner cette

possibilité. Les Reliques, dangereuses et réelles, qui, d'après Albus Dumbledore, ne sont qu'«un rêve que poursuit l'homme avec acharnement (...), [qu'] «un leurre pour les sots» (Rowling, «Reliques de la Mort»: 831).

D'après *Le Conte de trois frères* de Beedle le Barde mentionné dans le dernier tome de *Harry Potter*, il existe trois reliques: la Baguette de Sureau, la Pierre de Résurrection et la Cape d'Invisibilité. Rowling, en écrivant l'histoire des frères Peverell, s'inspirait du *Conte du vendeur d'indulgences*, extrait des *Contes de Canterbury* de Geoffrey Chaucer. Quoique l'idée de ces deux histoires, celle de Rowling et celle de Chaucer, soit similaire : les frères veulent vaincre la mort, la version de Rowling est un peu modifiée. Chaucer présente trois hommes-vengeurs qui décident, après la mort d'un ami, de tuer la Mort elle-même. Dans le lieu qu'ils considèrent comme sa cachette, ils ne trouvent que de l'or. Fatigués, ils décident de se reposer, mais quand l'un d'eux part chercher du vin, les deux autres intriguent afin de garder l'or. Dès que leur compagnon revient, ils le tuent et puis fêtent sans se rendre compte qu'ils boivent du vin empoisonné par leur ami. C'est la Mort qui triomphe de nouveau.

Dans l'histoire de Rowling, La Mort offre aux frères Peverell trois objets qui leur garantiront d'être plus puissants qu'elle. Cependant, elle ne dévoile que c'est uniquement celui qui choisira la cape d'invisibilité qui mènera une vie paisible, tandis que les deux autres regretteront rapidement leur choix. Celui qui a choisi la baguette sera tué par un voleur après s'être vanté de posséder «la puissante baguette qu'il avait arrachée à la Mort en personne, une baguette qui le rendait invincible» (Rowling, «Reliques de la Mort»: 479). Celui qui a choisi la Pierre veut ressusciter sa bien-aimée morte prématurément. Bien qu'elle revienne parmi les vivants, elle ne ressemble guère aux êtres vivants. Désespéré, le deuxième frère, «rendu fou par un désir sans espoir, finit par se tuer pour pouvoir enfin la rejoindre véritablement» (Rowling, «Reliques de la Mort»: 479).

En présentant cette histoire en détail, l'auteur essaie de présenter Lord Voldemort comme un être très faible, même s'il fait tout pour démontrer sa grandeur. D'un côté, il est extrêmement fort et invincible, mais de l'autre il est affolé par la mort et il veut à tout prix l'éviter. Nous pouvons même constater que son nom «vol de mort» qu'il a choisi lui-même dévoile sa fuite devant la mort. Il n'est pas capable d'accepter l'imminence de la mort.

Alchimiste ou seigneur des ténèbres? – en guise de conclusion

Quoiqu'il soit possible de retrouver quelques similitudes entre l'archétype de l'alchimiste et Lord Voldemort, il nous semble plus juste de le décrire comme «seigneur des ténèbres» en rappelant qu'il était ainsi appelé par les autres sorciers. John Clute et John Grant, dans leur ample *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, présentent le portrait détaillé d'un «seigneur des ténèbres», en énumérant ses traits distinctifs. Ils soulignent qu'un seigneur de ténèbres est une «force abstraite». C'est le cas de Voldemort qui – pour la plupart du temps, probablement dès le moment où il décide de partager son âme afin de créer les Horcruxes – ne ressemble plus à un être humain. Par conséquent, il est presque impossible de le tuer; même après sa première défaite contre Harry Potter, il ne meurt pas, mais devient une sorte d'énergie surnaturelle, ce qui souligne déjà son côté obscur. Hagrid avoue ne pas croire «qu'il ait eu en lui quelque chose de suffisamment humain pour mourir» (Rowling, «École des sorciers»: 263).

De plus, il est plutôt un symbole d'un «avilissement», d'un effondrement moral que de la sagesse. Le mal qu'il inflige provient de sa haine et de sa jalousie envers les autres.

Sa quête de l'immortalité fait aussi penser à sa dépravation. Il veut briser les lois de la nature et vivre éternellement. Cependant il ne le veut que pour lui seul et il est prêt à sacrifier de nombreuses vies, pour y arriver – rappelons que chaque Horcruxe implique le sacrifice d'une personne. Le sacrifice des autres, ainsi que la consommation du sang de licorne et l'utilisation du sang de Harry Potter pour revenir parmi les vivants font de Lord Voldemort un être quasi-vampirique, vu que le vampire est souvent considéré comme la représentation du mal. De plus, il dote le sang de pouvoirs magiques, comme si la consommation du sang de ses adversaires lui garantissait d'être invincible:

Mais moi, je savais que, si je voulais renaître aussi puissant que je l'avais été, il me fallait le sang de Harry Potter. Je voulais le sang de celui qui m'avait privé de mes pouvoirs treize ans plus tôt, car, alors, la protection que sa mère lui avait léguée coulerait également dans mes veines. (Rowling, «Coupe de feu»: 585).

En commettant des crimes à l'encontre des lois de la nature, en violant des valeurs traditionnelles, il rejette sa nature humaine en désirant être égal à Dieu.

D'ailleurs, Rowling, lors d'une interview pour *Entertainment Weekly*, le caractérise comme «un psychopathe furieux, dépourvu des réactions humaines normales face à la souffrance des autres» (Jensen). Ayant pris en considération les traits de caractère de Voldemort et la façon dont l'auteur le présente, nous le voyons comme l'incarnation d'un psychopathe, un homme qui transgresse des lois sociales et morales. Rowling dépeint son côté bestial en soulignant en même temps ses faiblesses typiquement humaines, juste comme si elle voulait montrer que le mal est un vice humain.

Lord Voldemort est-il donc un véritable alchimiste qui, en cherchant la voie de la perfection, s'est perdu dans les limbes de sa conscience et n'a pas réussi à réaliser son Grand Œuvre ou est-il uniquement un être monstrueux, un seigneur des ténèbres qui désire le pouvoir et qui ressemble plutôt à un criminel qu'à un grand esprit? La question reste ouverte, même pour l'auteure elle-même.

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“YOU’LL EVEN EAT FIRE:” FOOD IN CONTEMPORARY PROSE BY ROMANIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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***Abstract:** The following article is a brief exploration of several depictions of food and their functions in seven literary works, authored by contemporary women writers born in Romania and published over the last two decades: *Exuviae* (1997) by Simona Popescu, *Why the Child is Cooking in the Polenta* (1999) by Aglaja Veteranyi, *The Girl from the Oblong House* (2006) by Ana Maria Sandu, *Burying the Typewriter* (2010) by Carmen Bugar, *Lenka* (2010) by Elena Netcu, *42 Cățelu Road* (2012) by Alina Nedelea and *Dogs With Bagels* (2013) by Maria Elena Sandovici. These seven writers approach various themes in which food representations play different roles in describing life during and after the communist decades, either in Romania or abroad, in EU countries or in the USA, which reveals important changes in mentality and attitudes. For research purposes, these roles are grouped in four categories: ritual and sacrifice; space and boundaries; production and trade; last but not least, language, writing and creativity. While Popescu, Sandu and Netcu write their novels from within the former communist bloc, Veteranyi’s, Bugar’s, Sandovici’s and Nedelea’s books offer the perspective of those who left the country before or soon after 1989, with their families or by themselves, for whom food scarcity and general poverty were reasons of departure.*

***Keywords:** food studies, contemporary Romanian prose, women writers*

In the decade just before 1989, those Romanian authors who would have written critically about queuing for food sometimes risked their own life. Questioning the level of the kilograms of cereal yield per hectare or the working conditions, for example, was almost a heresy, the same as any doubt concerning the status quo. Curiously, references to food were also generally modest in the literature published in the 1990 s, when the cereal yield, for example, dropped considerably, due to the fall of the centralized economic and political structures. To write or not to write about food, as one of the basic aspects of human life,

has been a meaningful issue in women's writing, because the Romanian woman has been traditionally and sometimes stereotypically supposed to be a good cook, no matter the conditions, be they exogenous or endogenous, individual or social. Moreover, a focus on the social, cultural and political changes brought about by the 1989 Revolution reveals numerous metamorphoses related to food as well, which contemporary Romanian women writers have covered critically to different extents, in order to express their increased awareness of the multiple roles it plays in our everyday life and the paths of least resistance available.

It is nowadays generally agreed that the importance of the way in which food is depicted in society has increased over the last half century. Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, economists, nutritionists, philosophers, cultural theorists etc. have investigated various facets concerning food, so that nowadays food studies constitute a self-contained research domain. According to Roland Barthes (1979):

When he buys an item of food, consumes it, or serves it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies. That is to say that it is not just an indicator of a set of more or less conscious motivations, but that it is a real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication. (24)

Although depictions of food in literature started long ago, what makes it a subject in need of further attention is that there have been several dramatic changes during the twentieth century, such as technological and medical development, the progress of food production systems, the expansion of international trade, the demographic boom etc., which influence our access to food, the way we cook and eat, our understanding of food practices and their symbolic meanings. Considering the nineteenth century dictum that we are what we eat, our present-day identity depends very much not only on what we eat, but also on how, where, when and why.

In the introduction to his interdisciplinary study on key food concepts, Warren Belasco (2008) drew attention to the fact that "food is often taken for granted, especially by academics, who have long considered food questions to be too coarse for scholarly attention". As far as the Romanian researchers are concerned, they have only recently started to consider the interdependence

between food aspects and domains such as sociology, anthropology, literature-culture in general. It rests upon the new generations to interpret a reflection of Terry Eagleton (1998) on the semiotics of food in relation to language: “If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food. Like the post – structuralist text, food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation.”(204) When writers bridge food and subjectivity, they can reveal new perspectives on various underestimated phenomena at work in contemporary society. Moreover, certain conditions connected with food may be easy to understand in one cultural environment, while they may significantly differ in another. Since more often than not this is the case, the role of the literary and cultural researcher is to identify and interpret models and patterns, to find adequate explanations and to suggest solutions to problems.

All seven autobiographical novels and memoirs selected for this article tackle food and culinary factors, so as to address social, economic, political, psychological, erotic or linguistic aspects. Their motivations and aims vary in style and in terms of coding, decoding and recoding perspectives on eating habits. All authors were born in Romania and only Veteranyi’s, Bugan’s and Sandovici’s books are available in English – the first is a translation from German, the last two were published in English. What follows employs the close reading methodology, discourse analysis and anthropologic observation, aimed at identifying several functions of food in (de)constructing some cultural aspects of Romanian identity in the wider context of world literature.

A general predominant underlying characteristic of almost all episodes referring to food in these works is that all authors convey a substantial degree of urgency: food is the engine that moves the life machine, the matter which links body and spirit and the main source of metamorphosis; it often requires a ritual which involves sacrificial acts.

On the one hand, the most frequent sacrifice story in the selected novels is the slaughter of chickens. With one exception, all authors have a longer or shorter story to convey about it: Sandu and Bugan describe it against a rural backdrop; Nedelea and Veteranyi comment on killing the chicken in an apartment or, respectively, a foreign hotel room; whereas Popescu and Sandovici offer a detached, cultural perspective on the same topic. Their attitudes range from fear and disgust to strength and comedy, and gravitate around the dichotomy of what is proper/improper.

After witnessing her grandmother killing a chicken with a knife, Ana Maria Sandu's personage admits she is horrified: "I never eat chickens which I have seen myself executed like that." (46) In contrast, in her memoir, Carmen Bugan remembers killing a hen, which illustrates the girl's premature coming of age, when her mother returns from hospital and her father is in prison for political reasons: "Because there is no man in the house to cut the throat of the hen, I do it." (130)

Two other examples demonstrate how rural customs and urban settings come into conflict. Firstly, Aglaja Veteranyi's autobiographical novel, about a girl growing up in an inhospitable transnational context, touches the same topic in order to overcome the tension between what her family considers "civilization" and the lifestyle they left behind: "Slaughtering in a hotel is prohibited, so we turn the radio up, open the window, and make noise. I don't want to see the chicken beforehand, otherwise I'll want to let it live and keep it." (14)

Secondly, in Alina Nedelea's autobiographical novel, her family receives a cockerel, a gift from the countryside, which mirrors the socialist barter system between peasants and city dwellers. Because they keep it in their apartment until Easter, her mother knits a piece of clothing for it, in order to stop it from leaving droppings in the house. "On the Saturday before Easter, I was in the bathtub, trying to play my usual role as the butcher, Cook-a-doodle-doo's neck in one hand, the knife in the other, when suddenly I felt a tear on my cheek." (23) In the end, everybody agrees not to eat it anymore and the cockerel survives to eventually witness the 1989 Revolution.

The trend of departing from such practices is even clearer in Simona Popescu's chapter entitled "The Cookbook" and in Elena Sandovici's reference to a Thanksgiving turkey. In contrast with the other authors, Popescu is influenced by the "reality" of books rather than by what people usually consider reality. Drawing on medieval Christian imagination, she groups her intellectual experiences of reading her mother's cookbook in Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise. The most horrible cooking methods are obviously included in the Inferno section and eating is seen as a general source of nightmare.

In her novel, Elena Sandovici weaves the story of a Romanian family from Bucharest, who left for New York before 1989. Her main character, Maria, does not really understand the American custom of cooking a turkey for the

Thanksgiving: “She doesn’t see why she has to roast a giant bird in order to celebrate the rape and murder of the Native Americans. But she cannot deny her children the holiday.” (170) Roasting a bird is here subtly associated with Maria’s self-sacrifice as an immigrant mother coming from Eastern Europe, totally unwilling to live the American dream.

The comparison of people with fowls exists in Aglaja Veteranyi’s novel too, in which chicken language can supposedly be understood: “CHICKENS HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL SQUAWK WHEN THEY’RE SLAUGHTERED; WE UNDERSTAND THEM WHEREVER WE ARE.” (14) The plural and the capital letters emphasize the lurking generic conflict between “us” (the possible eaters) and “them” (the possibly eaten). By introducing the “squawk” into discussion, Veteranyi shows sensitivity to linguistic difficulties and the general sense of loss immigrants often have to cope with.

On the other hand, the novels introduce several traditional Christian food rituals such as: *grijire*, *pomană*, cooking for Easter or for Christmas. The *grijire* is described by Carmen Bugan as a way of “carrying worry” (30) and giving alms: people make a house of straw in which they place sacks of grain, rice and corn and invite poor people from the village to take them. She also writes about two types of *pomană*. The first type resembles almsgiving: “light a candle and then buy a fresh bagel and give it away to someone who is hungry.” (32) The second is a funeral feast, when close relatives of the dead invite other relatives, friends and acquaintances to eat and drink, so that the dead can eat and drink in heaven as they do on earth. Such details may explain the inadequacy of Romanian alms beggars in the West, regular scapegoats in tabloid mass media during the 2000 s.

The act of kneading *cozonac* (sweet bread baked for Easter and Christmas) is an occasion for Sandovici’s main character, Maria, and her friend, Mada, to practise traditional chores, to reveal their anxieties and convictions, to confess to being violent to their husbands, after they arrived in New York, to talk about sex and being a good wife, to eventually cry together. The method of cooking *cozonac* is mentioned in Carmen Bugan’s memoir too: “The difference is that at Easter we bake the *cozonac* in the clay oven in the yard, which is so big you have to fire it for days and you have to crawl into it, whereas at Christmas we bake everything inside.” (21) If in diaspora the cake is kneaded in the privacy of a kitchen, in Romanian villages more women from one neighbourhood usually gather in one place, so as to knead more dough at once

and to cook all their cakes together, which often has positive implications on the health of the community spirit.

Sarmale, originally a Turkish dish of grape or cabbage leaves rolled around a filling usually based on minced meat, became a “traditional” Romanian dish centuries ago. In Romanian communities living in diaspora, *sarmale* is a reminder of their homeland. In Elena Sandovici’s novel, Maria cooks them for her husband, when he returns to her for Christmas: “She knows how much he likes stuffed cabbage. Not just any stuffed cabbage. Hers.” (221) Cooking *sarmale* as well as *mămăligă* (the Romanian word for *polenta*) represents Maria’s forte and her personality, moments of full concentration and mnemonic strength, of which she is proud.

The link between food and crossing borders is prominent especially in connection with moving from rural to urban areas and with leaving the country, in search of better living conditions. Although the practice of eating out was one of the pleasures urban citizens could afford during the periods of liberalization (1960 s and 1970 s), it drastically diminished in the more austere 1980 s, when instead of being supplied with healthy food, Romanians were fed unhealthy nationalistic rhetoric and forced into almost inconceivable rationing, whereas the foreign debt was being paid off, with extreme consequences for the average citizen’s health. Therefore, eating in and cooking at home was the norm, especially over the last communist decade, but also during the 1990 s, both in the country and in diaspora.

In Elena Netcu’s novel, which covers most of the communist period, the villagers of Dunăreni, Tulcea county, live mainly on what they can grow in their yard, but also on what nature can offer, because the boundary between private and public sources of food is not completely regulated. All villagers eat at home and the women are supposed to cook for the whole family.

In an urban context, Alina Nedelea opens her autobiographical novel with a home party for New Year’s Eve, organized by her parents on December 31 st, 1988. Its succinct description is centered on the issue of food: “the guests are in my parents’ house, clink glasses of wine, laugh, eat (they do it at least on the New Year’s Eve, because food is usually scarce, but rarely found on the other days of the year).” (9) Bracketing one of the main predicaments of the 1980 s in a novel published more than twenty years after hints at internalization and

accommodation to a past full of deprivations, all coated – as already suggested – in comedy.

In Ana Maria Sandu's novel, eating in general comes under criticism, be it in or out. Ina, the storyteller, recalls having lunch together with her family: "Grandma used to cut her steak with a big kitchen knife. Surely she had dad in her plate, he had mum and mum had me... It was me who could hardly swallow and looked now at one, now at another, not really caring what bones they have to pick with each other." (94) The depressing atmosphere reminds us of the sombre 1980s: even though people could afford meat, it was so scarce that they could hardly enjoy their meal. Eating or drinking out is associated with a superficial lifestyle, as the following episode shows. In the 1960s, grandmother Viorica works as a chef in a restaurant kitchen from Bucharest. Since she has given birth to her first child, she is on maternity leave. One day, when she walks her daughter in her pushchair through the city center, she finds her husband having fun with another woman in a patisserie, where they drink beer and have a snack, which makes her lose control, because she thought he was at work. If before noticing them in the patisserie, Viorica feels so good about having a family, the unexpected encounter makes her radically change her perspective. The rural value of family life is seriously shaken in an urban setting, where people are more estranged and the social fabric is more fluid. The patisserie is depicted both as a safe and a risky place: it can offer food cooked by someone else, but it can also be a site of psychic trauma. The episode shows the divorce between the traditional and the modern, between collectivism and individualism.

Food has a prominent role in Aglaja Veteranyi's transcultural novel, as its title suggests. Being in another country sharpens the main character's attitude towards cooking and eating. The child would rather her mother cook at home, since it is more comforting: "I know my own country only by smell. It smells like my mother's cooking." (8) "My mother's cooking smells the same everywhere in the world, but it tastes different in foreign countries because of the melancholy." (10) Trying to overcome loss, the author emphasizes a sense of permanence based on anatomy: "Being in foreign countries doesn't change us. We eat with our mouths no matter what country we're in." (13)

Because Carmen Bugan's family lived in the countryside, most of whatever they ate grew in their yard. The author describes selling home-made wine as a form of socializing. Her grandparents used to sell it to the village folk, who gathered in their kitchen to make plans about their lands and animals: "The

kitchen becomes an evening sitting room.” (20) Later, when Carmen’s parents run a grocer’s shop, her family has access to processed types of food (salami or sweets) or food brought from other parts of the world (oranges). At the beginning of the 1980 s, the girl feels the threat: “Something is changing at my parents’ grocer’s shop. It is a new rhythm that has to do with food and affects how we behave at home.” (65) Indeed, like a seismograph, the individual notices small changes in people’s lifestyle, be they family members or neighbours. The back of the store turns into “a small café” (68), where her father and other locals meet to listen to Radio Free Europe and Voice of America and talk politics. When her family eventually escapes the secret police and they reach the border with Yugoslavia, her recollections mark the beginning of a new, more culturally hybrid epoch, which combines the global and the local: “Our family’s Big Unknown Voyage begins with *bunicu’s* plum brandy biting our tired, dry mouths as we cross the border. Then the first sips of Coca-Cola from a bottle that a Romanian expatriate shares with us on a train between Belgrade and Trieste.” (216)

In contrast with all the other books, Elena Sandovici’s personages can choose to eat out or at home. We are in a first generation immigrant’s mind New York. Initially, Maria cannot really (neither physically nor psychologically) eat out and even considers it a frivolity, preferring to cook at home and save money. At lunch she prefers to eat her sandwiches in “the break room,” a place at her office – a combination between eating out (as she is not at home) and eating in (as she is not in a restaurant). Conversely, her daughter Liliana, who would often rather starve than eat, accepts being invited out whenever the occasion arises. For her, eating in a public place is an opportunity to reveal the benefits of taking her time. In general, the author indulges in describing the setting of various restaurants, the types of food, the table arrangements and their impact on the psyche of her characters.

These seven authors’ attitudes to food production and trade are generally critical, as if procuring food were a burden or a sinful occupation, which can hardly be overcome. Forms of resisting the discourse imposed by the communist regime, their views are in line with the history of the lean 1980 s, when women had to run their households and raise children under dire circumstances, caused by the highly structured, hierarchical and centralized economic regime. Although queuing for food and forced massive volunteer work among pupils in

the 1980 s are two of the top aspects people remember, they are moderately featured in the selected books; if they are, tonalities differ very much.

Elena Netcu's novel gives a detailed description of the food circulation and production at various stages during the communist epoch. Her alter ego, Lenka, still a child in her home village, notices that men usually go fishing and hunting on the Danube and bring home fish, crawfish, wild geese or coots, while women go to the nearby forests to collect vegetables such as dock, ramson or dandelion leaves, but also flowers, which they sell at the town markets, wherefrom they bring oil, bread, sugar or rice. Apart from these activities, some of the families still work their lands, planted with cereal crops. When Lenka is young, she witnesses the imposition of the communist rule which forbids people to sell their own animals without approval from the local council. The main consequences are that people declare fewer animals, inebriate or hide them, and eventually become suspicious of each other, fearing somebody counts their nibbles. The collective form of labour payment, specific to the communist epoch, transformed the methods of food procurement among villagers, especially vegetables and grains: only a few make terms with the foreman, by carrying food into his yard, with the purpose of making him turn a blind eye to their own theft, while the poorest collect what remains in the field behind the agricultural machines.

When it comes to queuing, Elena Netcu illustrates the difficulties a mother had to face in the 1980 s. Because of the long, exhausting queues and since Lenka does not get on well with her husband, she has to stand in line herself, baby in her arms, sometimes leaving the house in slippers, hair uncombed, her role as a nurturer compromised. In Aglaja Veteranyi's book, the storyteller is convinced in Romania "standing in line is a whole job in itself." (10) However, in Elena Sandovici's novel, her characters find out moving to the United States does not mean the concerns about food disappear: "They walked through stores the way people walk through museums. They couldn't afford anything." (90)

In contrast, Carmen Bugan presents queuing from the salesman's point of view. She describes what happens on ration day at their grocery shop, when the government distributes food for a whole month. Food is not enough, people start queuing early and they even fight or get sick. This is the reason why her family decides to quit their jobs and start farming. After her father is taken to prison for rebelling against the regime, food becomes a real problem: "For the past three

weeks I have been living on water and walnuts *bunica* found in a corner of the kitchen, where they were forgotten by the Securitate.” (104) One day, her literature teacher gives her sandwiches when all the others at school despise her: “I can show no gratitude except by eating her food. With time, she will become the reason I believe that literature truly nourishes the hungry. She will become the reason I love morphology and syntax.” (109) Moving from the privileged position of food providers to the underprivileged one of the surveilled operates as a key factor in choosing to emigrate, while generosity in times of food scarcity fuels love for language and literature.

Differently than all the other authors, Alina Nedelea presents queuing as a hilarious enterprise, in spite of its fundamental seriousness:

I can still remember a game which Florentina, Luminița and I had invented. They were my childhood friends. We drew lots to decide who would enter an Alimentara, where we would have a dialogue like this:

“Good morning. Do you have oil?”

“No,” retorted the clerk.

“What about butter?”

“No butter either.”

“Meat?”

“What?”

“Any eggs?”

“Nooo!”

“Then, Madam, what the heck are you doing here all day long?”

And we would run away, baaing like frisky sheep, not even paying attention to the shop-assistant’s scolding. (13)

When she reaches the issue of volunteer work, Carmen Bugan remembers picking grapes, tomatoes, herbs and medicinal flowers. Sometimes it seems like work; on other occasions it is a pleasure. When the girl picks chamomile flowers, she feels they (the children) are “like explorers who bring gifts from faraway lands” (48). Simona Popescu offers an even rosier description of voluntary work, emphasizing her fraternal love for a classmate and focusing on her own writing style and subjectivity rather than on historical fact.

There, around the heap, thousands of invisible threads connected us.
We used to stay together for hours, we could face each other, speak,

share food during the breaks, butter the slices of bread for the boys, and they gave us fruit and peeled carrots. I was so happy with Hari next to me. I threw carrots onto the heaps and looked at his hands. It was embarrassing to look straight at him and I would do it only when he was speaking. When somebody speaks, you can look at him at leisure, running your eyes over all of his face, half listening to him, as he would not realize it. When they took us to gather potatoes and it was cold, we used to sit back to back to warm each other during the lunch break and I imagined that happiness could last for the rest of my life, for a whole life. That was how I imagined supreme happiness: sitting back to back on a field with heaps of potatoes, sunshine over our heads. (211)

In some cases, women have food related jobs. In Ana Maria Sandu's novel, Ina's grandmother is a cook in a restaurant in communist Romania. The female narrator in Alina Nedelea's novel temporarily worked as a waitress in Italy, while waiting to be offered a job in mass media. Aglaja Veteranyi and her mother worked as refugees in a German chocolate factory. All of these episodes show working in a food-related field makes women feel discredited. Maria's case in *Dogs With Bagels* is even more telling. Immediately after their arrival in New York, her husband Victor, who was an architect in Romania, worked as a night watchman and adapted faster to the new lifestyle. In contrast, Maria, who studied Romanian and French at the University of Bucharest, was more nostalgic and could not really adapt. When she is offered a job as a cake decorator, because no English skills were necessary for that, she feels insulted, because she thinks her qualification as a librarian can help her find a better job. Later, husband and wife fight over her refusal to start working together with other Romanians. When she is offered another job, she accepts to babysit for the children of Josephine, a Haitian black mother, with whom she incidentally starts speaking French in a supermarket. Josephine eventually encourages her to replace her in a department store, when she moves to another city, and their friendship allows Maria to see "actual beauty in New York, beauty she could relate to." (144)

All these examples picture figures who challenge the oppressive structures of production and trade in more or less subtle ways, ranging from downright disapproval and protest to creative detachment and silent resistance and also to humour and quest for the authenticity of everyday life.

Why do women write about food, cooking and eating? Because these subjects are a source of inspiration, especially when they are associated with a long journey or a flight of imagination: two of these novels are built around food metaphors to convey individual or family troubles; many of them start with a food episode; four of them refer to food practices frequently; and one contains a whole intense chapter about a cookbook. All of these remind us food is not simply biological or material. It is also an intangible, symbolic instrument which defines family, class and ethnicity.

In Elena Netcu's novel, when Lenka is fourteen, she goes on a hunger strike and locks herself in her room for three days, in order to convince her parents that she wants to continue her studies and become a teacher. Afterwards, her father decides to give her a piglet, to fatten it during the summer, to sell it in autumn and, thus, earn money, so that she could afford to live in Iași as a student. Eventually, she passes the entrance exam and starts a new life. Although almost none of the novels included here refer to pig slaughtering, sacrificing a pig gains a new meaning in Netcu's story, because it happens not only for pork meat or money: the aim is learning, progress, spiritual development. However, things are more complicated than they seem. Her father is an orphan and always has the impression he is not enough of a man, hence his regular drinking sessions and nervous breakdowns, for which he is famous in the village. When his wife leaves him, he attempts to commit suicide and makes a show of it. After cutting a living piglet's ear, he immediately feels remorse and cuts one of his own ears, to the horror of his neighbours. He dies soon after Lenka is admitted to university. His untimely death represents the sacrifice of the poor on the altar of progress and reflects the paradoxical position of pigs as simultaneously part of and the opposite of civilization, as Ashley et al. (2004) suggest, as well as a temporary asset in a structurally changing society.

The phrase "dogs with bagels" reminds us of a Romanian idiom: any place where dogs run around with bagels on their tails is an imaginary land of ease and plenty, as the land of Cockaigne is. The expression appears in Carmen Bugan's memoir, when she portrays an office clerk from Galați, where she went to take her first passport. His careless and unexpected question – "Do you think in America the dogs run around with bagels on their tails?" – appears to her an example of "the typical vile rhetoric of patriotism". Although she does not reply, his interpellation sets her wondering: "Does he know that my childhood was

sacrificed on the altar of love for this country? How empty people become when their stomachs are full.” (196) The opposition emptiness/fullness is relevant here, because it generates questions about the philosophical category of order in the context of contemporary cultural transformations. Although the teenager is initially intrigued, she later realizes the American dream is rather her father’s dream: “I have a feeling he imagines that dogs really do run around with bagels on their tails in America and, moreover, they speak Romanian.” (203) Given that her father is now considered a hero, because he believed in social and political change and risked his own life for it, dogs with bagels may exist, as long as there are people who believe in their existence. “You’ll even eat fire” (97) is what he snapped at her when he left for Bucharest, to protest against the regime on his own.

Elena Sandovici’s novel proposes different answers to Carmen Bugan’s questions. Mrs Stoica, an elderly Romanian who is one of Maria’s best friends, once tells her: “People do come here from all over the world. So many people come here from so many places. They think in America dogs run around with bagels on their tails. *În America umblă câinii cu covrigi în coadă.*” (151) In her heart, Maria agrees America is no land of Cockaigne, but she is forced by circumstances to believe in the American dream. That she has felt all the time like a fish out of water is revealed by a story of her own naivety. One day, she runs away from home, leaving her children and husband behind, trying to find “a job as a French speaking nanny” (291) in Scranton, a town in Pennsylvania, somehow in the middle of nowhere. After a few days of searching, she cannot find anything and has spent almost all her money. At some point she confesses: “the only thing I could really afford from room service was a bagel.” (291) After this failure, she returns home and splits up with her husband. Scranton and bagels become personal symbols of betrayal. Depressed as she is, Maria can hardly forgive herself for leaving her children, even though it was only for a few days. Only after more than ten years she manages to ask her husband to forgive her and braves herself to tell her daughter about it. In the end, Maria and her husband celebrate their reconciliation with “gourmet bagels, with cream cheese, lox, and scallions, a far cry from the bland pieces of dough she had in Scranton.” (302) As mentioned before, bagels are traditionally associated with almsgiving in Romania, while abroad they tend to be utopian, unreachable. Recoding the meaning of bagels – from failure to pleasure – is, therefore, in line with Michel de Certeau’s use of food as a form of resistance against oppressive conditions, imposed by dominant cultures.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most harrowing “food story” is Aglaja Veteranyi’s. The title *Why the child is cooking in the polenta* is a leitmotif throughout her novel. Its double meaning as both a question and an answer stands for a pot forever simmering. It is a story her stepsister invents to calm her down when their mother, who is a circus artist, hangs by her hair in the big top. But the migrant girl does not take the story for granted: “I ask my sister why God lets the child cook in the polenta. / She shrugs her shoulders.” (68) Because no family member and no friend bothers to reply, she formulates further questions, tells the story to her dog or tries to find answers herself by inventing even more terrifying tales: “God is a cook. He lives in the earth and eats the dead. He can chew open my coffin with his big teeth.” (70) The final scene resembles a dramatic act: her mother “made polenta for God” (177) and “out of love for poor suffering humanity, God will eat polenta.” (178) Aglaja Veteranyi committed suicide in 2002, in Switzerland. Her novel acts as a warning against too high expectations and proves once more that mankind should be more careful with the conditions and the meaning of happiness.

The four examples given in this last section show that mixing life experience and writing can be healing in most cases or it can at least serve as a lesson. Writing, as a form of producing food for thought, and reading, as a form of consuming it, parallel or rather intersect the materiality of nourishment. Studying the meaning of food depictions and how they operate demonstrates that writing and reading produce a greater awareness of the multiple features of nourishing. In Simona Popescu’s view, her mother’s cookbook represents “the most interesting adventure book,” “my fundamental book.” (74) It is “mainly a book of literature, which I leaf through sometimes only out of pure aesthetic pleasure,” “a compendium of poetic combinations”. (83) But the girl’s appetite is not for real food. Changing the aim of reading a cookbook draws attention to the reasons and the purposes of reading and of consuming in general.

Since little has been published about the importance of food in contemporary Romanian women’s literature, this article has aimed at revealing why these seven authors, most of them mothers, have turned to autobiographical writing and often focused on food and culinary phenomena. From the Danube Delta to New York, the urgency of writing on food and the variety of their perspectives can bring forth an increased awareness, especially among women readers, of the dynamic vision of food culture and of its capacity to mediate and

allow cultural negotiation and *mélange*. It has likewise exposed a series of transformations in terms of attitudes and mentalities to food, primarily by way of comparison: rural and urban conditions, national and international circumstances, individual and social representations, as well as real versus imaginary edible material.

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IMPASSABLE CULTURAL BORDERS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *INTERPRETERS OF MALADIES*

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Abstract: *This paper sets out to discuss the mechanisms of cultural clashes as illustrated by three short stories included in Jhumpa Lahiri's debut collection, **Interpreter of Maladies**. By focusing on this topic, the present article aims to identify the main obstacles that prevent the (non)migrant, Indian and American characters from engaging with the difference of others. While global interconnectedness and the fluidity of borders are highly popular themes associated with fiction of migration, the present paper discusses a less theorised topic such as the failure to process cultural difference, despite the individuals' increasing mobility. By adopting this approach, I intent to expand the existing body of research in the field of literature and migration, by foregrounding the relevance of fractured dialogues in the context of contemporary relocations from the East to the West. Besides offering possible explanations for the occurrence of cultural clashes, the present study implicitly formulates suggestions for minimising the distance between diverse sets of cultural norms. While discussing rigid perspectives, superficial interests or parallel outlooks, the paper signals the fact that crossing cultural borders is not always a natural effect of the transgression of physical frontiers. In this way, the present argument is an invitation to more nuanced interpretations of literary creations that deal with cultural encounters in the context of migration.*

Keywords: *boundaries, clash, cultural translation, exotic, group, individualistic*

Introduction

This paper provides an investigation of several cases of cultural clashes illustrated by Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, *Sexy* and *A Temporary Matter*. The innovative aspect of this research consists of the attempt to unravel mechanisms of cultural conflicts that seem active despite the global context of interconnectedness where they function. While literary studies of diaspora literature largely privilege the idea of fluidity, cultural hybridisation and multiple cultural visions (S.P. Moslund 2010), the present paper advances

the assumption that migrant literature also presents cultural misinterpretation as a major barrier to human interaction. This analysis seeks to formulate a comparative framework regarding the occurrence of cultural clashes in the case of female and male, Indian and American characters. More specifically, this study focuses on failed cultural communication that reveals the implications of separatist notions of cultures held by migrant and non-migrant individuals. One conception that impedes cultural dialogue is carried by Indian characters that tend to maintain cultural borders by emphasising their cultural difference. Other failures to communicate are triggered by superficial engagements with cultural difference displayed by both Indian and American characters.

Theoretical background

In order to better understand the mechanisms of cultural clashes, the present discussion relies on several studies that discuss specific aspects of South Asian and American cultures. Triandis' socio-psychological investigation establishes that some cultures (the USA and other English speaking countries) tend to focus on the individual as the basic unit of social perception, while others favour a more group-oriented approach to identity (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin America) (1993: 159-160). Comparing the American and Hindu Indian morality of caring, Joan C. Miller concludes that Americans are more inclined to promote a independent view of the self, while the Hindu Indians privilege an interdependent dimension of identity (4). These theoretical findings are useful in accounting for a series of cultural clashes presented in the works analysed. However, my argument does not seek to employ the notion of cultural clashes as proof of the difference between Indian and American conceptions of identity. Rather, it attempts to account for what happens when individuals cling to their specificity and become unable to process alternative patterns.

The present discussion will employ the notion of cultural translation in order to highlight the (non) migrant characters' inability to perform a transfer of cultural meanings. Migration is closely associated with border-crossing phenomena, involving physical and symbolic movement from a source to a target culture. Hence, migrants are considered "translated beings" permanently engaged in a process of negotiating cultural values (Cronin: 45). In this context, cultural translation is the transfer of meanings generated by necessity to render cultural plurality (cultures) into a common cultural language (Culture) that enables communication between different outlooks (47). Papastergiadis notes

that migrants engender new cultural meaning by translating the previously known – together with the unknown – into something that is knowable (136). He considers that a right approach to cultural exchanges should not stipulate either the appropriation of a foreign culture according to rules of one's own or the faithful reproduction of foreign ways (129). According to Longinovic, the process of cultural translation can be broadly defined as a contact between two semiotic registers (6) or as a “transposition of one set of ‘foreign’ cultural codes into a new, ‘domestic’ set of cultural meanings” (10). The reality/process of failed cultural exchange can be accounted for by the notion of incomplete cultural translatability:

[...] the concept of translation involves the transposition of one set of “foreign” cultural codes into a new, “domestic” set of cultural meanings, while the referential universe remains peculiarly suspended in the process. This suspension of “reality” in the process of translation between languages manifests irreducible differences that are proper to each of the registers placed in an encounter of cultural bridging, which echoes the impossibility of total translation between cultures (Longinovic: 10).

Considering the importance of cultural specificity in cross-cultural communication and the possibility of failed cultural translation, the next part of the paper foregrounds examples of cultural encounters that result in fractured dialogues. More specifically, the discussion investigates three situations of obstructed communication, illustrated by three short stories included in Jhumpa Lahiri's collection entitled *Interpreter of Maladies*.

Corpus analysis

Jhumpa's Lahiri debut book focuses on cultural interactions between migrant and non-migrant characters belonging to different cultures (American and Indian) and different generations. The author is particularly interested in the question of communication across cultural borders, a difficult process despite the context of mobility and boundary transgression that are associated with contemporary migration. “Interpreter of Maladies”, the short story that gives the name of the entire collection,” presents Mr. Kapasi, an Indian guide who accompanies the Das couple (Raj and Mina) and their three children (Tina, Bobby and Ronnie) on a sightseeing trip in India. Mr. and Mrs. Das are second

generation South Asian Americans; they occasionally visit their parents who have returned to India after retirement. From the very beginning, Mr. Kapasi is surprised by the perceived discrepancy between their Indian looks and their “quintessentially American” (Chetty: 66) behaviour. Mr. Kapasi’s essentialist expectations are revealed as he expects the tourists to display cultural values similar to his own. For example, as Mr. Kapasi greets the tourists in the Indian fashion, he is surprised to have his hand grasped in the American way. Another element that takes him aback is the Das’ apparent lack of parental responsibility: “Mr. and Mrs. Das behaved like an older brother and sister, not parents [. . .] it was hard to believe they were regularly responsible for anything other than themselves” (Lahiri: 49). The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Das look like elder siblings, as opposed to parents, is interpreted by Mr. Kapasi as proof of their inadequacy as responsible adults. The Indian guide finds it difficult to accept a version of “careless” (Brada-Williams: 458), “irresponsible” (Park: 38) parents. While observing Mrs. Das, Mr. Kapasi registers her lack of concern for the rest of the family, classifying her as “a self-absorbed American woman and mother” (Chetty: 70). The idea of self-centeredness is suggested by Mrs. Das’ polishing her nails and her unwillingness to let her daughter Tina do the same. Her selfishness is also suggested when she eats puffed rice and neglects to offer it to anyone else. Her indifference becomes more striking as she walks past her children “as if they were strangers” (Lahiri: 58).

At the same time, Mr. Kapasi perceives Mina Das as a desirable woman who contradicts his familiar models of womanhood. He secretly admires her breasts, “the golden brown hollow in her throat” (Lahiri: 58), “the scent on her skin” (Lahiri: 55) and “the back of her legs” (Lahiri: 58). His attraction is paralleled by her interest in his job as an interpreter of maladies (working as an interpreter for Gujarati patients and an Indian doctor who doesn’t speak Gujarati). Before meeting Mrs. Das, Mr. Kapasi considers his job a “thankless occupation” (Lahiri: 51), associating it with a distortion of his youth ideals. As a self-taught young man, Mr. Kapasi intended to employ his multilingual knowledge (Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Gujarati, English, French, Russian, Portuguese, Italian) in global acts of interpretation: “He had dreamed of being an interpreter for diplomats and dignitaries, resolving conflicts between people and nations [...]” (Lahiri: 52). This grand ideal was obstructed by Mr. Kapasi’s “settled marriage” (Lahiri: 52) that eroded his erudition: “English was the only

non-Indian language he spoke fluently anymore” (Lahiri: 52). This detail reveals the perceived conflict between Mr. Kapasi’s desire for self-development and the pressure to live up to group’s standards rather than individual values. As Brada – Williams notes “Mr. Kapasi is responsible for his family to the point of giving up his own dreams” (458). Along similar lines, Park considers Mr. Kapasi a mature adult who sacrifices himself in order to provide for his family (43). When he considers his wife’s low opinion of his job, Mr. Kapasi contrasts the female model embodied by his spouse with Mrs. Das’ version. His wife’s reluctance to acknowledge his skills is contrasted with Mrs. Das’s laudatory stance; she pronounces the job “interesting”, “romantic” (Lahiri: 50) and “a big responsibility” (Lahiri: 51). The woman’s sudden interest in his profession increases Mr. Kapasi’s self-esteem along with his attraction to Mrs. Das: “She had also used the word ‘romantic’. She did not behave in a romantic way towards her husband, and yet, she had used the word to describe him” (Lahiri: 53). Mr. Kapasi interprets Mrs. Das’ behaviour as an invitation into the world of romantic love that is absent from his experience: “When Mr. Kapasi thought once again about how she had said ‘romantic’, the feeling of intoxication grew” (Lahiri: 53). Mr. Kapasi’s infatuation expresses his eagerness for a relationship that would allow him to fulfil the ideals shattered by his marriage. Mr. Kapasi evaluates Mrs. Das from his own cultural perspective; hence, his admiration for her marks his appreciation for a different model of female identity and expresses his need to transgress familiar (restrictive) cultural norms. The fact that Mr. Kapasi considers his marriage deficient is also suggested by his defining it as “a bad match” (Lahiri: 58) filled with “bickering, indifference, protracted silences” (Lahiri: 53). His surrender to an unhappy marriage reveals the idea of duty that governs his conception of family.

Similarly, Mrs. Das’ interest in Mr. Kapasi’s job reveals her need for a remedy against the isolation experienced in her marriage. Having kept the secret of an affair for eight years, Mrs. Das needs to tell someone that her son Bobby is the result of an affair. Her disclosure reveals a feeling of frustration similar to that of Mr. Kapasi but triggered by different reasons. Mina experiences wifehood as a condition of utter seclusion that worsens when she becomes a mother. After having her first child, Mina faces new challenges by herself, since Raj is busy with his teaching career. Mina’s brief affair with one of Raj’s acquaintances suggests her need for an outlet, given the pressure of loneliness and motherhood. Her keeping the secret for eight years amplifies her agony and

illustrates the dramatic dimension of her solitude.

Since Mr. Kapasi evaluates the couple through his own cultural grid, he is unable to decode Mrs. Das' confession of adultery other than an act of betrayal. This suggests that he conceives his job as a translator in the sense of linguistic translation, excluding the possibility of cultural translation. This fact accounts for Mr. Kapasi's surprise at Mrs. Das's request for translation considering that both of them speak English: "But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?" (Lahiri: 65). His premise suggests that he does not envisage the process of interpretation as a transfer of cultural meanings and therefore fails to reach understanding. Consequently, he interprets Mrs. Das' affair as a "common, trivial little secret" (Lahiri: 66) and he passes judgment on the act of wifely cheating. However, I agree with Brians' statement regarding Mr. Kapasi's hypocrisy given that "he has just been dreaming of seducing her [Mrs. Das] himself" (Brians: 198). Ironically, it is the sense of duty and not the feeling of compassion that triggers his decision to interfere with Mrs. Das' predicament: "Still, Mr. Kapasi believed it was his duty to assist Mrs. Das. Perhaps he ought to tell her to confess the truth to Mr. Das" (Lahiri: 66).

A supporter of group-oriented conceptions of identity, Mr. Kapasi is loyal to the idea of arranged marriage, although he himself is unhappy within it. Given the prevalence of duty over personal ideals, Mr. Kapasi cannot read Mrs. Das's affair as an outlet for her individual frustrations: "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?" (Lahiri: 66). The fact that he points out her guilt indicates Mr. Kapasi's inability to relate to Mrs. Das' need to prioritise her own feelings while being also a mother and wife. The present short story employs the symbol of the monkey god as a protector of marriage. The monkeys that attack Bobby – the child who resulted from the adulterous relationship – stand for an Indian condemnation of wifely infidelity. Hinduism conceives marriage as a sacred communion that prescribes mutual fidelity as the most important duty (Damian: 379). In Hindu mythology, Hanuman is the monkey god who helps Rama reunite with his kidnapped wife Sita (Wilkins: 19-197). Hence, the monkey's aggression towards Bobby represents the Hindu condemnation of marital unfaithfulness. The occurrence of a cultural clash is also illustrated by Mrs. Das's awareness that she is misunderstood, which renders the dialogue with Mr. Kapasi useless:

She opened her mouth to say something, but as she glared at Mr. Kapasi some certain knowledge seemed to pass before her eyes, and she stopped. It crushed him; he knew at that moment that he was not even important enough to be properly insulted (Lahiri: 66).

The impossibility of reaching an agreement suggests that neither of the characters tries to see the situation through one another's perspective. On the one hand, Mr. Kapasi judges Mrs. Das according to a system of values that she does not share (the idea of duty). On the other hand, Mrs. Das's clinging to the "independence and privacy she has learnt in America" (Brians: 198) prevents her from understanding Mr. Kapasi's critical stance. This clash suggests that neither of the characters is able to perform cultural translation, i.e. transfer the idea of an individual's own needs into a cultural pattern that stresses duty and vice versa. At this point, I agree with Brians' interpretation of the characters' failure to interact: "this is a story of two people crossing at an angle through each other's lives, neither satisfied with the response of the other" (198). In this case, the characters' inability to see things from a different perspective illustrates their inability to transgress familiar boundaries and acquire more flexible grids of evaluation. The next short story presents a rather different scenario of unsubstantial communication embodied by the relationship between an American woman (Miranda) and a married Indian man (Dev).

"Sexy" presents another example of failed cultural interaction illustrated by two parallel cases of marital infidelity (Dev's affair with Miranda and Laxmi's husband's liaison with an English woman). Laxmi is Miranda's Indian colleague who informs her about her cousin's misery, while Miranda herself is involved in an affair with an Indian married man, Dev. While babysitting Laxmi's cousin's son (Rohin) for a day, Miranda finds out the child's perspective on his father's affair. Her encounter with Rohin reshapes Miranda's attitude to her relationship with Dev, triggering her decision to end it. The relationship between Miranda and Dev can be interpreted as a paradigmatic case for failed cultural dialogues. I consider that the concept of "sexy" denotes a surface understanding of otherness that obstructs communication. Dev treats Miranda's curiosity about his background as a caprice, providing her with scarce explanations. For example, when Miranda inquires about a detail from the map of India, Dev's answer entails a refusal to engage in serious discussion: "Nothing you'll ever need to worry about" and he tapped her playfully on the

head” (Lahiri: 84). When Dev feels like talking about himself, he only reveals sketchy information about his Indian existence (drinking mango juice, playing cricket and taking afternoon naps). “He told her about how, at eighteen, he’d been sent to college in upstate New York during *something* called the Emergency” (Lahiri: 94; emphasis mine). Thus, he avoids the significance of historical Indian references such as the Emergency – a controversial historical episode of independent India (Spear 2: 266-267). This attitude suggests his refusal to grant Miranda full access into his world. The very idea of an affair points to Dev’s unwillingness to include Miranda into his space. He informs Miranda about his marital status from their first encounter, establishing the parameters of their relationship. During their affair, he is always very careful to conceal any traces of his infidelity. For example, when his wife is in India, Dev does not spend the night at Miranda’s place lest his wife should call and he is not home. Dev’s reluctance to share his background with Miranda is paralleled by his minimal interest in her. His personal questions refer to the number of her previous lovers and the age when she lost her virginity. His attraction to her is triggered solely by her physical peculiarity, given that she is his first lover with “legs this long” (Lahiri: 89). Therefore, Bahmanpour is right to argue that Dev’s attitude to Miranda illustrates how “the native Self can fall prey to the process of Othering” (49). Along similar lines, Chetty also remarks “the detached objectification Dev enacts on her [Miranda], without any concomitant desire for a true relationship” (45).

Miranda “who is neither Indian nor Indian-American” (Chetty: 41) introduces a non-Indian perspective in the short story. Her ignorant attitude is illustrated by the fact that she does not own an atlas or “any other books with maps in them” (Lahiri: 84). Her lack of mobility outside the United States seems limited, too, since “the farthest Miranda had ever been was to the Bahamas once when she was a child” (Lahiri: 91). Miranda’s scant knowledge of geography also surfaces during the visit at the Mapparium, when Dev deciphers the configurations of the world map to her. Her limited global awareness also stands out when in comparison to Rohin and his obsessive memorising of the world’s capital cities. Another element that illustrates Miranda’s limited exposure to cultural difference is her association of the word Bengali with a religion instead of ethnicity. Her single contact with South Asian people dates back to her childhood when she lived next door to an Indian family, the Dixits. Her contact

with the family as a child resulted in an extreme fear of them, triggered by the image of Goddess Kali in their home: “For months afterwards she’d been to frightened even to walk on the same side of the street as the Dixits’ house” (Lahiri: 96).

While partially accountable in childhood, Miranda’s protracted awe later translates as her adult ignorance regarding South Asians in America. In this respect, I agree with Chetty’s claim that Miranda’s evolution from childhood to maturity entails her oscillating between inadequate attitudes to alterity:

she has now moved from a conservative fear of ethno-cultural other to a liberal celebration of difference that still locks the cultural ‘other’, embodied here in her ‘Indian’ lover, as always other. Both conservative fear and liberal celebration keep her cultural others fixed in her imagination (43).

Indeed, Miranda’s attraction to Dev seems mainly triggered by his difference from her previous partners. His alterity is suggested by his dark complexion that makes Miranda infer that he might be “Spanish or Lebanese” (Lahiri: 87). Moreover, his dissimilarity from Miranda’s notion of a partner is implied by his atypical behaviour:

Unlike the boys she dated in college [. . .] Dev was *the first* always to pay for things [. . .] He was *the first* to bring her a bouquet of flowers so immense she’d had to split it up into all six of her drinking glasses, and *the first* to whisper her name again and again after they made love (Lahiri: 89; emphasis mine).

When comparing Dev with her previous lovers, Miranda realises that his behaviour stands out through a special manner of courtship. As she acknowledges him as the first man who has treated her in a special way, this foregrounds Dev’s adherence to a set of values that sets him apart from the majority of the men she has encountered previously. Another detail that indicates Dev’s difference is his habit of taking naps that springs from an Indian routine: “Miranda had never known an adult who took naps, but Dev said it was something he’d grown up doing in India” (Lahiri: 94).

While attracted by Dev’s specificity, Miranda’s knowledge about his cultural background remains limited despite their physical intimacy. For

example, she tries to extract details of his biography by studying the map of Bengal printed in *The Economist*. Chetty's remarks regarding this particular newspaper offer an interesting connection with Miranda's exotic approach to Dev. On the one hand, this newspaper is published in Britain, therefore producing a "filtered version of India through British consciousness" (Chetty: 44). On the other hand, it is "a symbol of capitalism and consumption that 'sees' India as an economic value in the global capitalist system" (Chetty: 44). Therefore, the fact that Miranda attempts to retrieve information about Dev's background from *The Economist* implies her "desire to consume what is for her a beckoning, exotic India"(Chetty: 44). Indeed, Miranda's efforts to discover details about Dev's native space remain fruitless since the map presents graphical economical statistics: "She turned the page, hoping for a photograph of the city where Dev was born, but all she found were graphs and grids" (Lahiri: 85). Miranda's general idea about India relies on an exotic imagery that evokes a world of Oriental beauty, of "deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon" (Lahiri: 96). Miranda tries to increase her little knowledge of India by seeking to master the Bengali alphabet. As she attempts to learn Bengali phrases from a menu in an Indian restaurant, she cannot memorise them. She is not discouraged by this first difficulty and she strives to transcribe "the Indian part of her name, 'Mira' " (Lahiri: 97) in Bengali letters. On the one hand, Miranda's gesture illustrates her desire to be included into Dev's world and perhaps an attempt to see herself from his perspective. On the other hand, her solitary endeavour points to the lack of support from Dev during Miranda's attempts to understand his cultural background. The transcribing exercise is, in fact, an exercise of processing otherness that remains unfinished. While Park interprets this episode as a proof of Miranda's childish nature, I think it also suggests her beginning to approach difference in a way that dismantles the fear of the past. As Miranda struggles with the Bengali alphabet, she is surprised that its foreignness can actually be meaningful:

It had taken her several tries to get the letters of her name to resemble the sample letters in the book, and even then she was not sure if she'd written Mira or Mara. It was a scribble to her, but somewhere in the world, she realized with a shock, it meant something (Lahiri: 97).

Miranda's uncertainty as to the accuracy of her cultural appropriation underscores the risks of cultural misunderstanding in the absence of a mediator. The element of shock reveals Miranda's awareness of the great barrier between her world and Dev's. Her inability to accurately take in the sense of otherness is also connoted by her clumsy drawing of Rohin. While sketching the child's features, the woman realises that she experiences the same difficulty as the one met in rendering her own name in Bengali letters: "Her hand moved in conjunction with her eyes, in unknown ways, just as it had that day in the bookstore when she's transcribed her name in Bengali letters. It looked nothing like him" (Lahiri: 105). Her inability to create a resembling portrait of the Indian child points to Miranda's lack of success in relating to cultural difference. Another episode that indicates her superficial understanding of Dev's background is her (mis) spelling of an Indian surname (Mottery instead of Madhuri). When she finds out from Dev that his wife looks like an Indian actress (Madhuri Dixit), Miranda is curious to uncover details about this movie star. She goes to an Indian grocery store to rent an Indian film featuring the actress. Chetty considers that this is a proof of Miranda's wish to have a deeper understanding of the Indian culture: "She goes to the store not to 'learn' about India the fashionable way – through the Bollywood movie scene – but instead to see what Dev's wife looks like" (45-46). However, I think Miranda's visit to the Indian grocery illustrates her unmanageable relationship with aspects of the Indian world. Besides misspelling the actress' surname, Miranda refuses to make further inquiries about Madhuri Dixit assuming that she looks the same as the Bollywood dancers from the video covers:

She saw women wearing skirts that sat low on the hips and tops that tied like bandannas between their breasts [. . .]. They were beautiful [. . .] with kohl-rimmed eyes and long black hair. She knew then that Madhuri Dixit was beautiful, too (Lahiri: 99).

Miranda's reflections denote a stereotypical thinking that shapes her homogeneous outlook on Indian women. Having made up her mind about Dev's wife's looks, Miranda gives up renting an Indian movie. This suggests that her interest in Indian culture is an accidental occurrence triggered only by her encounter with Dev. Thus, Miranda's approach to Indian culture is a superficial

one in the sense that her attempts to grasp some of its aspects are short-lived, fickle episodes. For example, Miranda gives up her self-teaching Bengali after only one attempt, which suggests her lack of a solid motivation to engage with otherness.

In this context, the couple visit to Dev's favourite place in Boston, the Mapparium, may be considered an interesting symbol of fragmentary cross-cultural dialogues in a world that apparently facilitates border transgression. More specifically, the Mapparium scene suggests an ideal scenario of cultural communication afforded in the global age of proximity. Since the setting faithfully reproduces the planet's geo-political features, it hints at the contemporary shrinking of physical and cultural distance.

The possibility of crossing cultural borders is suggested by the transparent bridge which seems to bring individuals from different cultures together. This impression of proximity is also strengthened by the special acoustics of the room that enables Miranda to hear Dev's whisper ("You're sexy") from the other side of the bridge: "She watched his lips forming the words; at the same time she heard them so clearly that she felt them under her skin" (Lahiri: 91). Dev's compliment triggers Miranda's desire to anticipate his expectations from a sexy woman. She buys the items considered appropriate for an ideal lover: high heels, a cocktail dress, sheer stockings, and a satin slip. However, her conception of "sexy" does not match Dev's since he prefers "the sight of her long legs" to her outfit (Lahiri: 93). Realising the mismatch between her and Dev's understanding of "sexy", she gives up wearing the dress.

As she babysits Rohin, the Indian son of a cheated Indian wife, Miranda is able to consider her relationship with Dev from a different perspective. Rohin's behaviour denotes a sense of forced maturity presumably triggered by his family's dissolution caused by his father's affair. Park is right to remark on his mature insights and knowledge (20-21). Rohin's maturity is illustrated by the somewhat authoritative tone in which he requests bizarre things for a child, such as coffee and insisting that Miranda wear the cocktail dress. Ironically, Rohin's reaction is analogous with Dev's since the child pronounces her "sexy". When asked to explain what he understands by "sexy", Rohin reluctantly answers that it means "loving someone you don't know" (Lahiri: 107). Critics have interpreted Lahiri's children as marking the human ability to transgress cultural borders, by creating their own bridges across cultures: "The children of Lahiri's stories foster, unknowingly, a wide and sweeping 'transcendence of the

boundaries' that encircle their parents, their neighbours, and both their cultures" (Caesar quoted in Park: 25). Indeed, Rohin's encounter with Miranda entails a transgressive potential since the boy actually reveals the true meaning behind Miranda's relationship with Dev. While the grown-up Dev evades a clear rendering of the term "sexy", Rohin provides a paradoxical, yet enlightening definition. Rohin's contradictory elucidation of the term "sexy" uncovers the central mechanism that obstructs the possibility of cultural dialogues between Dev and Miranda. While the idea of "sexy" points to the existence of physical attraction, the lack of love indicates the absence of actual interest in the Other. This mutual yet flimsy interest is summarized by Chetty who considers that "her [Miranda's] blinded gaze at Dev's exotic Indianness blinds her against seeing his consumption of her" (Chetty: 45). Since Rohin's remark triggers Miranda's awareness of her shallow connection with Dev, Chetty argues that Miranda's relationship with Rohin can be considered "the first significant relationship with an Indian" (49). I think his observation is partially accurate, since it registers the awakening of Miranda's awareness regarding her wrong approach to Dev's difference. At the same time, I do not consider that Miranda's relationship with Dev lacks significance, given that it does open a path to a different culture.

Miranda's crying after processing Rohin's definition of "sexy" suggests that she is sad to realise that her relationship with Dev cannot transgress the conventions of an affair. Raj Chetty considers that her desire for a serious relationship is sincere, while Dev is simply attracted to her difference: "Dev [. . .] objectifies Miranda absolutely, desiring her only for her difference and for her sex, whereas Miranda's exoticism is also partially a desire for a true relationship" (Chetty: 46). Similarly, Bahmanpour claims that the relationship fails because Dev's strong detachment clashes with Miranda's attempts to get into this world: "This call for a healthy Self/Other relationship, however, fails for the very reason that the response of the immigrant Other is not as open as the native Self" (49). I think Chetty's position is more adequate in that it captures the superficial stance of both protagonists, while Bahmanpour seems to favour a dual interpretation of the characters in terms of immigrant narrowness and native openness that is not encouraged by "Sexy".

I think the value of the short story lies precisely in its illustration of how an exotic approach to difference is not simply a privilege of the West. Both an immigrant and an American make the mistake of valuing one another through a lens that reinforces their differences, rather than commonalities. The characters'

emphasis on their differences prevents the communication scenario glimpsed in the Mapparium (i.e. transcending cultural distances):

In the Mapparium that day, all the countries had seemed close enough to touch, and Dev's voice had bounced wildly off the glass. From across the bridge, thirty feet away, his words had reached her ears, so near and full of warmth that they'd drifted from days under her skin (Lahiri: 109).

The use of the past tense connotes the end of Miranda's hopes of becoming more than Dev's mistress, which is reinforced by her eventual decision to end their relationship. If *Interpreter of Maladies* illustrates the characters' entrapment in distinct cultural spheres, "Sexy" foregrounds the halfway efforts to understand otherness, that are stifled by the characters' inability to detach from their fascination with cultural difference for its own sake. The next part of the paper analyses the emergence of communication gaps within an Indian immigrant couple.

"A Temporary Matter" situates a cultural clash at the family level, between individuals from the same culture. The short story presents the decline of Shoba and Shukumar's marriage triggered by their son's stillbirth; Shoba undergoes a miscarriage while Shukumar is attending a conference in Baltimore. Their estrangement is portrayed as a sequential process ranging from absent to partial and eventually complete communication that also marks the potential end of their relationship. While "Interpreter of Maladies" presents alienated couples simulating decent marriages, "A Temporary Matter" scrutinizes the dynamics of acute alienation prior to the couple's actual separation. Deeply affected by the death of their baby, both Shoba and Shukumar cannot find the resources to continue their relationship. Shukumar feels guilty for being away when his wife miscarried, although she suggested he should go to the conference. Shoba seeks to confront her trauma by working long hours and going to the gym. During her breakdown she displays a complete disinterest in cooking Indian food and she cannot get closer to Shukumar:

he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible. He thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her coloured pencils and her files, so that

he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping (Lahiri: 5).

The couple's state of utter alienation denotes the absence of communication that renders their relationship devoid of intimacy. Park considers that their baby's death stands for the dissolution of their common ethnic and cultural history, which would have been invoked for his upbringing: "Because the baby is dead, so is the thriving Indian culture which used to permeate their marriage. Like the jars of home-canned vegetables and the freezer bags full of carefully cut meat, this connection has been emptied, broken, and abandoned" (Park: 32). The critic accurately remarks that Shoba's interruption of her cooking rituals has been caused by her traumatic loss. However, one can only speculate the extent to which the couple would have educated their son according to Indian standards. Nevertheless, Park's interpretation is helpful in that it provides a link between "A Temporary Matter" and the thematic focus of the entire short story collection. Since *Interpreter of Maladies* presents a range of cultural clashes, "A Temporary Matter" offers an example of miscommunication partially triggered by the lack of sufficient cultural commonalities.

The couple's estrangement is suspended by a five-day electrical shutdown from 8-9pm that creates a context for a peculiar type of dialogue. Remembering the power failures in India, Shoba suggests that they could play the game of her childhood, when everybody had to say something in the dark: "A little poem. A joke. A fact about the world" (Lahiri: 12). According to Bandyopadhyay, the power cut suggests the great difference between America and India:

Of course, where in the USA it is only a temporary matter and the local consumers receive notice and ample time for preparing for the situation, in India it is not so [. . .] In this case, Lahiri makes the distinction quite vivid but a mere hint can sometimes alert the readers to these situations that mark India and the USA as so far apart (101).

I do not think Lahiri uses the symbol of the power cut to suggest the difference between the two countries. However, I think Bandyopadhyay's claim can be extended with respect to Shoba's and Shuklumar's different relations to Indian culture. Communication in the dark is a practice associated with Shoba's

more intense exposure to India, since she is the one who chooses the power cut as a frame for their possible dialogue. Similarly, her rich knowledge of Indian cooking practices accentuates her increased familiarity with her Indian background. Her longer exposure to India marks the cultural difference between her and Shukumar. Along similar lines, Shukumar's replication of Shoba's Indian dishes illustrates his intention to reconnect with her through their cultural commonalities. I argue that their different degrees of attachment to their Indian heritage are likely to account for their failure to communicate in normal circumstances. Shukumar's interest in India develops later in life, hence he feels a little unprepared for Shoba's Indian game. His desire for his own childhood experiences in India emphasises his weak status in the game suggested by Shoba. His minimal direct contact with his parents' native country places Shukumar in the position of a player that can be easily manipulated:

Shukumar hadn't spent as much time in India as Shoba had. His parents, who settled in New Hampshire used to go back without him [. . .]. It wasn't until after his father died, in his last year of college, that the country began to interest him, and he studied its history from course books as if it were any other subject. *He wished now that he had his own childhood story of India* (Lahiri: 12; emphasis mine).

At the same time, Shukumar's little contact with India may imply the lack of commonalities between him and Shoba, which eventually hinders their communication. Shoba employs the frame of the Indian game in order to eventually inform her husband of her decision to leave him. The exchange of their confessions implies that communication becomes possible only in unusual circumstances: "Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again" (Lahiri: 19). The one hour of darkness spells out a break in their estrangement, enabling the performance of a dialogue otherwise absent. Similarly, Park considers the beneficial effects of darkness arguing that it may possibly heal rather than create a childlike fear (33). While I do not think that these conversations in the dark heal the protagonists, I agree that they at least remind them of their common history. The association of darkness with a transient possibility of closeness is also suggested by their desperate lovemaking on the fourth night. Their need to share, emphasised by Park, becomes more important in this process. Since the "trauma of the experience Shoba and

Shukumar endured was individual rather than shared” (Park: 32-33), the characters have grown alienated. Hence, their conversations in the dark trigger their acknowledgment of an important commonality: the un-mourned loss of their baby. However, their peculiar dialogue builds a fragmentary path to understanding, given that their first exchanges reveal minor truths about their relationship. Shoba’s first statement lets Shukumar know that she had checked his address book two weeks after their meeting to see if he had written her in. Then she admits having claimed to work late once while actually going out with a friend. Third, Shoba reveals that she has not told Shukumar that he had a dab of pate on his chin as he was speaking to his supervisor. The fourth night, Shukumar finds out that Shoba considers the only poem published by him sentimental. Shukumar finds it more difficult than Shoba to select the contents of his declarations. His first statement lets Shoba know that he has forgotten to tip a waiter on their first date, and so he went back and left the money with the manager the next day. The second confession refers to Shukumar’s copying from an American colleague during his Oriental Civilization exam. On the third night, Shukumar informs Shoba that he returned the present given by her for their third wedding anniversary and used the money to get drunk. The fourth truth refers to his attraction to a woman from a magazine during Shoba’s pregnancy. The content of these confessions reveals their flimsy potential for communication, given that both characters reveal certain truths that do not have a strong impact on either of them. Shoba’s first four retorts illustrate degrees of her betrayal since they refer to both hidden truths and lies. Shukumar’s confessions uncover a similar pattern since they evolve from rather innocent secrets to acts that stress his marital frustrations: “Somehow, without saying anything, it had turned into this. Into an exchange of confessions- the little ways they’d hurt or disappointed each other and themselves” (Lahiri: 18). Although their terse conversations do not reveal essential information about each other, they foreground a broken pattern of communication that provides an incomplete mutual understanding. The game becomes an exercise of finding out “what they didn’t know about each other” (Lahiri: 16).

A gender approach to this short story regards Shoba’s confessions as “an alternative knowledge, subjectivity, and agency outside his [Shukumar’s] knowledge and control” (Williams: 72). The same argument considers that her refusal to cook after the traumatic events illustrates her intention to rebel against Shukumar. I consider this observation relevant only in so far as it stresses the

idea that it is difference – in this case Shoba’s independent self – that obstructs communication. The conversation game enabled by darkness is a substitute for the lack of communication in their relationship. The fifth night disrupts this pattern of communication since the electricity is restored earlier than announced. Still, the couple attempt to extend their game, having dinner with the lights off. Shoba’s last declaration differs from the previous ones in that it is uttered with the lights on and presents her intention to end the marriage. The fact that she turns on the lights when voicing this declaration signals the end of the game convention. Beyond the safe area of a pastime, utterances have a different impact, provoking resentment, pain and anger. The content of her statement indicates an actual act of communication since it is the first time she reveals a significant truth. Shukumar’s response is also painful, as he tells Shoba that he has seen their dead baby before his cremation. Therefore, the fifth night marks a transition from the conversation as a game in the dark to a painful, yet meaningful communication with the lights on.

As a conclusion, the short story comprises three stages of the communication process: absent communication, apparent communication and meaningful communication, i.e. a dialogue that delivers a specific message. The end of the short story illustrates the traumatic and terse dimension of meaningful communication. In this case, the exchange of truths between Shoba and Shukumar is effective as it discloses essential facts that presumably accelerate their separation. I have decided to end this paper with the analysis of “A Temporary Matter” since it illustrates the point of my approach to cultural clashes, namely that they are nuanced processes, triggered by heterogeneous factors.

Conclusion

The analysis has established that, irrespective of their nationality, most characters fail to communicate across cultures given their inadequate approach to cultural difference. Whether Americans or Indians, migrants or non-migrants, the protagonists discussed in this paper cannot perform cultural border crossings, although they seem attracted by cultural others. By choosing to present a less conventional theme of migration literature, Jhumpa Lahiri signals the relevance of cultural miscommunication as possible reality of our global village. Mrs. Das and Mr. Kapasi seem trapped in their sets of distinct cultural conventions, being unable to transcend individualist and group-oriented cultural

norms. Their fragmentary exchange reveals their rigid outlooks that leave little room for transcending their own cultural specificities. The cultural clash unfolded in “Sexy” reflects Miranda’s and Dev’s incapacity/unwillingness to relinquish an exotic perspective on foreign cultures. More specifically, both characters seem attracted to cultural difference for its own sake without trying to transgress it and engage in communication. Last, but not least, the peculiar interactions between Shukumar and Shoba illustrate the effect of missing commonalities in the fabric of cross-cultural communication. The underlying implication of the analysed examples is that transgressing cultural boundaries is a matter of flexibility, motivation, and willingness to become open. At the same time, these failed instances of cross-cultural interaction are reminders that the cultural logic of globalisation implies not only a celebration of diversity, but also a challenge to process it.

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LANGUAGE

LA FORCE ARGUMENTATIVE DE LA MÉTAPHORE DANS LE DISCOURS DE LA PRESSE FRANÇAISE ÉCRITE

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***Abstract:** In this article we propose to highlight the relationship between the argument and the metaphor of the Ukrainian crisis in the discourse of the French written press. To this end, we will use the model of the Semantics of Possible Arguments (SPA) proposed by Olga Gălățanu, which allows us to interpret the metaphors both through the stereotypes of the semantic matrix of the lexeme components and through the Actual discursive realizations. Our analysis will consider three dominant conceptual metaphors in our French corpus: the metaphor of war, the metaphor of natural disaster and the metaphor of disease. The conclusion of this research will underline the argumentative sequence put forward by French journalists, using the conceptual metaphors of war, natural disaster and illness.*

***Keywords:** argumentation, Ukrainian crisis, metaphor, Semantics of Possible Arguments.*

Introduction

Afin de faire ressortir la valeur argumentative de la métaphore dans le discours journalistique portant sur la crise ukrainienne, nous allons nous appuyer sur l'approche sémantico-pragmatique, plus précisément sur le modèle SPA (Sémantique des Possibles Argumentatifs), créé par Olga Gălățanu.

Notons également que le corpus sur lequel repose notre analyse est constitué d'une cinquantaine d'expressions métaphoriques, extraites principalement des quotidiens français (*Le Monde, Le Figaro, L'Humanité, Le Parisien* etc.) en version papier et électronique entre 2013 et 2015. Ces expressions métaphoriques sont les traces linguistiques de trois métaphores conceptuelles: LA DIPLOMATIE POLITIQUE, C'EST LA GUERRE; LE

CONFLIT EST UNE CATASTROPHE NATURELLE et LA CRISE POLITIQUE EST UNE MALADIE.¹

Le modèle SPA

La sémantique des possibles argumentatifs (SPA) proposé par Gălățanu (1999, 2002, 2003, 2008) est un modèle de description-(re)construction-représentation de la signification lexicale contextuelle des mots sur la base des mécanismes sémantico-discursifs et pragmatico-discursifs d'activation du potentiel argumentatif.

Le modèle SPA comporte quatre niveaux (Gălățanu 1999):

- *Le noyau (N)*: comporte des traits de catégorisation nécessaires (TNC) qui nous fournissent des informations sur : la nature grammaticale du terme (verbe, nom, etc.), ses traits modaux (épistémique, aléthique, etc.) et son orientation axiologique (positive ou négative) et des marques abstraites (Marie 2009: 3).
- *Les stéréotypes (Sts.)*: sont le résultat de l'interaction entre le noyau et d'autres représentations. Ils constituent «les blocs d'argumentation interne» de la signification lexicale.
- *Les possibles argumentatifs (PA)*: sont des séquences discursives, issues de la combinaison des éléments du stéréotype du mot avec d'autres représentations sémantiques (les stéréotypes d'autres mots) (Gălățanu *apud* Marie 2009: 5). Ceux-ci représentent les blocs argumentatifs externes de la signification lexicale.²
- *Les déploiements discursifs (DA)*: sont des séquences argumentatives obtenues par l'enchaînement des occurrences discursives en contexte.

Le modèle de représentation sémantique SPA met en évidence le rôle argumentatif de la signification des mots et fait leur analyse dans le cadre de l'enchaînement discursif qu'ils forment. Donc, la SPA prend en compte aussi bien la «partie stable» de la signification lexicale que son cinétisme, sa partie dynamique, évolutive, imprimée par le contexte.

La raison pour laquelle nous nous sommes arrêtées à ce modèle est représentée par le fait que celui-ci permet une analyse argumentative qui

¹ Les cognitivistes distinguent entre *métaphore conceptuelle* qui structure notre système de pensée et *expression métaphorique* ou *métaphore linguistique* qui est un cas concret, particulier de la première (Lakoff, Johnson 1980).

² Le dispositif constitué du noyau et des stéréotypes est géniteur des probabilités discursives.

recouvre à la fois les phénomènes inférentiels, reposant sur des informations contextuelles/co-textuelles, et les phénomènes linguistiques discursifs, reposant sur le potentiel argumentatif des termes.

Le modèle SPA nous permet de surprendre dans l'analyse de notre corpus la contamination contextuelle qui se manifeste dans la construction des expressions métaphoriques dans la presse française par des associations argumentatives non-conformes avec le protocole sémantique des mots, puisque la signification de l'énoncé métaphorique s'appuie sur le DA, mais ne correspond pas au *topos* sémantique de PA.

Analyse du corpus

Ce modèle nous aidera à mettre en évidence la structure des représentations de la guerre, de la maladie et de la catastrophe naturelle à partir des blocs internes d'argumentation (comprenant le noyau et les stéréotypes) des expressions métaphoriques par l'association du mot avec chaque élément de son stéréotype.

Notons les abréviations établies par la SPA qui nous permettent de schématiser notre analyse: DC (donc), PT (pourtant), ET (et), OU (ou).

La métaphore: LA DIPLOMATIE POLITIQUE, C'EST LA GUERRE. LA GUERRE

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique</i>	Stéréotypes (Sts.)	Déploiements discursifs (DA)
Rapports conflictuels	DC confrontation armée	<i>...lutte contre la corruption endémique en Ukraine.../ ...lutte d'influence...</i> <i>... bataille de l'information contrôlée par les oligarques ukrainiens....</i> <i>... une bataille géopolitique entre la Russie et les États-Unis...</i> <i>... guerre des rumeurs...</i> <i>... terrain de la confrontation démocratique...</i> <i>... croisade diplomatique...</i> <i>... l'Union Européenne n'a pas mené le combat...</i>

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique</i>	Stéréotypes (Sts.)	Déploiements discursifs (DA)
		<i>... propagandes occidentale et russe s'affrontent...</i> <i>... (le scrutin ukrainien) un champ d'affrontement entre les États-Unis et la Russie...</i>
	DC prise d'otages	<i>... l'Ukraine... l'otage d'intérêts étrangers ...</i> <i>..._le peuple ukrainien, pris en otage dans ce conflit...</i>
DC Mobilisation des forces armées	DC enrôlement	<i>..._____l'enrôlement des gouvernements sous la bannière des États-Unis et de l'Otan...</i>
	DC organisation des combattants	<i>... la diplomatie allemande est en première ligne...</i> <i>... Merkel, en première ligne sur ce dossier...</i> <i>... l'Union européenne qui doit monter en première ligne...</i>
DC Munition	DC attaque armée	<i>... salve d'obus diplomatiques...</i> <i>... tirs diplomatiques nourris...</i> <i>... coup de poignard dans le dos de la démocratie...</i>
	DC danger	<i>... (Ukraine) bombe à retardement...</i> <i>... (Ukraine) une poudrière....</i> <i>Moscou, Washington et Bruxelles jonglent à grenades dégoupillées.</i>
DC Offensive	DC assaut	<i>... une diplomatie russe de plus en plus offensive...</i>
	DC intensification du conflit	<i>...(le sommet Ukraine-EU) ... avait mis le feu aux poudres en Ukraine...</i> <i>M. Ianoukovitch.... a mis le feu aux poudres...</i> <i>Les lois liberticides ont mis le feu aux poudres.</i>

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique</i>	Stéréotypes (Sts.)	Déploiements discursifs (DA)
ET Défensive	DC protection	... <i>défendre leurs intérêts politiques...</i> ... <i>défendre les sanctions contre Moscou...</i> ... <i>a défendu le projet (partenariat oriental avec l'Ukraine)...</i>
	DC paix	... <i>désamorcer le conflit...</i>

L'analyse SPA de la métaphore LA DIPLOMATIE POLITIQUE, C'EST LA GUERRE nous indique que la structure sémantique du mot «guerre» accentue certains aspects de la crise ukrainienne tels: l'intensification du conflit russo-ukrainien, la prise de position des grandes puissances, le danger d'extension de cette crise à l'échelle mondiale, mais aussi l'espoir fragile d'apaisement du conflit.

**La métaphore: LE CONFLIT EST UNE CATASTROPHE NATURELLE
LA CATASTROPHE NATURELLE**

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique et moral</i>	Stéréotype (Sts.)	Déploiements argumentatifs (DA)
Phénomène naturel violent	DC peril	... <i>catastrophe gouvernementale...</i> ... (la crise ukrainienne) <i>cataclysmes incontrôlables...</i>
DC Instabilité	DC peur	... <i>l'orage en Europe...</i> ... <i>vent mauvais de guerre sur l'Ukraine...</i> ... <i>vent mauvais sur le monde...</i>
	DC tension	... <i>période de froid...entre Kiev et Bruxelles...</i> ... <i>sérieux coup de froid entre Washington et Moscou...</i>
DC Désastre	DC dégradation	... <i>la « guerre froide »... s'est réchauffée...</i> ... <i>guerre tiède....</i>
	PT possibilité de	... <i>conflit gelé (en Ukraine)...</i>

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique et moral</i>	Stéréotype (Sts.)	Déploiements argumentatifs (DA)
	stagnation	<i>... gelant la ligne de front...</i> <i>... guerre froide...</i>

La représentation métaphorique du conflit en termes de catastrophe naturelle présente des déploiements argumentatifs spécifiques comme: le danger du déclenchement d'une troisième guerre mondiale, la dégradation des relations diplomatiques entre les grandes puissances ou la faible possibilité de stagnation du conflit russo-ukrainien.

La métaphore conceptuelle: LA CRISE POLITIQUE EST UNE MALADIE

LA MALADIE

Noyau (N) <i>Prédictat nominal</i> <i>Axiologique négatif</i> <i>Physique et moral</i>	Stéréotype (Sts.)	Déploiements argumentatifs (DA)
Dégradation de l'état	DC symptômes	<i>...symptômes... la Russie poutiniennne...</i>
	DC malade	<i>... les Nations unies...malades.</i>
DC Aggravation	DC inactivité	<i>...les Nations unies... paralysées... ... paralysie <u>politique</u>...</i>
	DC décès	<i>...métastases de la crise politique...</i>
DC Dérèglement	DC folie	<i>L'Ukraine.... folie nucléaire...</i>
PT État guérissable	PT traitement	<i>....thérapie de choc à la bruxelloise (les réformes occidentales pour l' Ukraine)</i>
	PT remède	<i>...réanimer l'OTAN... ... (l'Ukraine) couper...le cordon ombilical avec son « passé communiste »....</i>

Nous observons que la structure argumentative du terme «maladie» met en évidence, entre autres, la cause du déclenchement du conflit russo-ukrainien: la Russie poutinienne et l'incapacité des grandes puissances (telles les Nations Unies) à mettre fin à la crise ukrainienne, ce qui entraîne l'aggravation de la situation dans ce pays.

Pourtant, la notion de maladie laisse entrevoir l'espoir de guérison. C'est pourquoi l'Union Européenne propose des mesures fermes afin d'aider l'Ukraine à sortir de la crise: des reformes dures et l'abandon complet de son passé communiste.

Conclusion

Selon nous, le modèle SPA est efficace dans l'analyse argumentative des expressions métaphoriques, car il nous permet de les interpréter moyennant une représentation scalaire des lexèmes impliqués dans leurs réalisations. De plus, il nous aide à interpréter les métaphores d'une part par le biais des stéréotypes inclus dans la matrice sémantique des lexèmes composants, et d'autre part par le biais des réalisations discursives effectives, à valeur argumentative. Donc, nous avons aussi bien une représentation globale de l'expression métaphorique par rapport à d'autres expressions métaphoriques présentes dans le discours qu'une analyse structurale de celle-ci qui fait ressortir le mécanisme discursif qu'elle parcourt du noyau au déploiement argumentatif.

L'analyse SPA du corpus français (expressions métaphoriques de la guerre, de la catastrophe naturelle et de la maladie) met en évidence divers aspects de la crise ukrainienne, tels: l'intervention inefficace des grandes puissances, l'intensification du conflit russo-ukrainien, le danger du déclenchement d'une troisième guerre mondiale.

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THINKING VS. LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATION. A COMMUNICATION MODEL BASED ON THE THEORY OF CONCEPT-HOLES

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***Abstract:** In 2012, we launched the fundamentals of a theory we called 'theory of concept-holes', that has the role of polarizing previous conceptions about language seen as a structure of culturally-shaped holes, transmitted as a cultural pattern to all members of the language community (Saussure 1916; Benveniste 1966; Coşeriu 1996). This theory consists in a set of six sentences, i.e. a system of statements grounded in Karl Popper manner of formulating epistemological statements (Lesenciuc 2012). Based on the statements of this theory, a communication model can be drawn, and the current article is aimed at providing the framework of debate on the relationships between thinking and language, in order to propose such a model. The relationships between thinking and language are very complex and needs an assumed approach. The general framework of this designing a communicative model based on the theory of concept-holes is the assumed structuralist approach.*

***Keywords:** structuralism, theory of concept-holes, thinking, language, langue, langage, communication.*

1. Introduction

Starting with 2012, we proposed the statements of the theory of concept holes (Lesenciuc 2012; Corte-Real 2013; Lesenciuc & Roman 2016; Lesenciuc & Lesenciuc 2016). The theory was detailed and expressed in a set of six statements, as follows:

- i.** Language is a structure of concept-holes.
- ii.** Concept-holes are culturally shaped and transmitted to all members of a linguistic community;
- iii.** In the process of language learning (including the process of learning the creation within language), the holes of the language are filled with

signified content according to the language user's experience, his scale of values or his *Weltanschauung*.

iv. Communication within a linguistic community involves the relation between the same structures of concept-holes (communicative patterns) and the different contents (individually connoted) of these structures of holes.

v. Intercultural communication involves the relationship between different structures of holes and different contents.

vi. Common communicative patterns can be found in different cultures; therefore, intercultural communication can start with the setting of common concept-holes structure. (Lesenciuc 2012:174-175)

In order to propose a model of communication based on this theory, we should discuss about the relationships between thinking and language. Due to the impossibility of using English terminology, we propose the terms' operationalizing based on the structuralist terminology that feeds the theory of concept-holes. In English, Ferdinand de Saussure's operational terms *le langage* and *la langue* are interchangeable. Their translation in English, *language*, is confusing, especially in linguistic studies. To avoid any confusion within this article, we chose to operate with the French terms, but not within the restricted equation proposed by Saussure (1972:44): language (*le langage*) = language (*la langue*) + speaking (*la parole*). We made the choice of using the meanings proposed by Émile Benveniste (1966), who considers the possibility of exploiting the language (*le langage*) within the limits of structuring the form of thinking, and that assign linguistics two subjects: *le langage*, "faculté humaine, caractéristique universelle et immuable de l'homme" and *la langue*, always particular and variable, within which *le langage* is performed (Benveniste 1966:19).

2. Language and thinking – defining limits

The fundamental role of *langage* is one of transferring meanings, being a vehicle of culture. Therefore, the main function of *langage* is communication. *Le langage* is more than the practice of *langue*, partially expressing the reality – a reality preserving the culture patterns and equally shaping culture – and recreating a reality able to communicate about itself. *Le langage* is, as we have already seen in the relationship with the unique field of supersymmetry (SUSY),

an energy field, a linguistic field (previously defined), carrying ‘particles’ that describe the field (physical signs themselves), being thereby the highest form of expression of human faculties: that one of symbolizing reality by signs (Lesenciuc; Roman 2016:75-83)³. Thus, rather than being a vehicle of culture, *le langage* serves to coagulate culture.

Unfortunately, *le langage* is only the expression of ‘what we want to say’, while what we really want to say, the thinking, regulates its relationships with *la langue* and the expressed reality. The relationship between *le langage* and thinking is not symmetric. Thinking cannot be reduced to atomic units, able to be digitally represented. The risks of this reduction are actually the limitations of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1991)⁴, on the one side, and the impossibility of proving one of the assumptions of the language of thinking: the public language hypothesis or the *Mentalese* hypothesis, on the other side⁵. In a previous comment on this issue, I emphasized the impossibility of discerning the relationships between thought and *langage* with scientific means:

³ In 2016, we proposed a model of describing the linguistic field based on the pattern of the unique field of supersymmetry (SUSY): “If we understand that language (*le langage*) – the energetic, linguistic field, carrier of ‘particles’ that describe the field (proper physical signs) – interacts at the subtle level of language with thoughts, that language (*le langage*) is a “particles” bearer that generates the linguistic field (communication), and that between these different types of particles there is a continuous relation of mutual transformation – within the model of the supersymmetry field, according to the lines of energetic field, within the linguistic model along with the force lines of language, culturally determined, describing concept-holes – it is easy to understand what is the relation signifier-signified from the new perspective. Thus, we may appreciate, how can thoughts fill with signified content the language alveoli, i.e. how is possible that those deep meanings (modelled not only individually, by life experience, system of values and own *Weltanschauung*, but also culturally) to get back to signs that are subject to communication cycle and eroding, transforming and changing the alveolar walls of language.” (Lesenciuc, Roman, 2016:81)

⁴ The limitations of the work are reflected in both the subsequent positioning of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1993, for example) and within *Tractatus*’ sentences, through “the logical construction of the world” made by the sentences stated in their logical importance: “6.522. There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words” (Wittgenstein 1991:123).

⁵ The hypothesis of the public language of thinking, assumes that the language of thinking is the language of speaking. The hypothesis of the *Mentalese* language, launched by Jerry Fodor and Gilbert Harman, assumes that thoughts are *mental sentences* and concepts *mental words*. “Some theorists of mind have claimed that thought takes place in a language-like medium. They have called this language ‘Mentalese’. Mentalese has a syntax, a semantics, and a morphology, though discovering these proprieties of the language of thought will likely require extensive empirical investigation of the mind”, considers F. Egan (2010:422) in *Concise Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*

In the first hypothesis, just images could belong to *l'impensé* [...]. But “the sentences, unlike the images, are independent in relationship with the environment. While the relationships between image and imaged are – in a vague sense – natural or intrinsic, the relationships between name and named are arbitrary” (Devitt; Sterelny 1999/2000:142). It follows that, although the thoughts relate to conventions and conventions are linked to the reality, the mental sentences should take into account the image, and, therefore (arrived at a deadlock of the first hypothesis and approaching more the *Mentalese* hypothesis), they are nonstructured mixture of graphemes, phonemes and icons. Not only that: they could be sequences of acoustic vibrations, belonging to *l'inouï*, sequences of electrical or otherwise signals. The brain still remains a black box that produces complex answer-signals: the thoughts. But these thoughts cannot ignore the way of reaching the source (inputs) by the stimuli. The thoughts are *n*-sensorial signals, simplified at the level of their utterance in sentences (using conventions). Besides, the early thoughts precede conventions (Devitt; Sterelny 1999/2000:142), and thinking reveals what cannot be reflected by the language (*langue*), as long as its expression through speech or writing (conventional acts) reveals the language (*langage*) restriction (convention) (Lesenciuc 2006:11-12).

Le langage remains insufficient in relationship with *la langue*, thinking inclusively in the marginal area of active differences, exploiting the marginal of the post-structuralist Derrida (1967). Closely associated with *la langue* – with its concept-holes – the thinking has an important role in eroding or re-shaping the alveolar margins of the concepts because the fluid content of thinking flows. These were called by Michel Bréal *the latent ideas of language (langage)*. The interstitial area of *le langage*'s latencies, where the analogue/digital relationships⁶ took into account when analyzing the relationship thinking/*le langage*, is illustrative in our intention to highlight the fact that thinking

⁶ Regarding analogue/digital communication, our discrimination is based on the precepts/axioms of the Palo Alto School, but exceeds the meaning of analogue communication from non-verbal communication to all those instances of communication that call the analogical measurements: reporting to discrete, continuous and positive quantities (see more the entire chapter entitled *Comunicare analogică și digitală (Analogical and digital communication)*, in *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (Watzlawick et al. 1967/2014:66-74).

understands what *le langage* is not able to express (the concrete alleged units, implied in the transfer of discrete units). From such a perspective, the theory of a super-language of thinking is superfluous, even though, as Oscar Wilde noted, “our thoughts are born ready dressed”. A metalanguage may be only digital. Therefore, the coverage (in fractal meaning) of the surface of *langue*, analogically expressed, is impossible, despite the fact that the length of the perimeter of *langage* tends to ∞ . The generation of analogue from digital is impossible. Considering all these, the main relationships are established between *langue* and thinking, and not between *langue* and *langage*.

From a different perspective, the relationship between thought and *langage* is a relationship between dynamic and static. *Le langage* reproduces infinitely a ‘perimeter’, contributing therefore to the coverage of the semantic area of the word. This area became dense, but never completed. ‘*Le langage* is just a tool used to follow the land of *la langue*’, we assumed within a previous paper (Lesenciuc 2006:17). The static perspective on *langage* is counterbalanced in dynamic communication by the utilization of *langage* as a tool that is used in a process that involves changing, without changing itself. The idea is sprouted from the Wittgenstein’s *picture theory*, based on sentences 5.471-5.4711 from *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1991:89) that implies the picture theory of proposition is a particular case of the theory of representation. *Le langage* can be seen as a tool and its concepts as tools as well. This perspective is valuable as long as, expressing the relationships between *langage*, *langue* and thinking, *le langage* is really used as a tool, activated by thinking, in contact with the universe of dynamic representations:

Le langage cannot be a special environment, a privileged host for miraculous phenomena such as representation, but a tool that describes itself its usefulness as it is used. Through *langage* we can communicate or think, but moreover we can do thinks whose existence cannot be suspected by us, so far. (Stan 2002:55).

The relationships between *langage* and thinking are, therefore, dynamic, despite the static nature of *langage*. Moreover, *langage* is a carrier of common experience that activates thinking and gets in touch with the dynamic holes of *langue* that activates itself the representational field. Conversely, the holes of

language, potentially representational, activate *le langage* through thinking, expressing therefore its own experience.

The previously analyzed relationship is illustrative, however, for debating the ‘inability’ of total communication⁷. Not benefiting by the same content of thinking that fill the concept-holes of *langue*, the transmitter and the receiver will think differently on the same thing expressed through *langage*. Each actor of communication operates with his/her own faculties of covering the not covered or filled areas of words and concepts, negotiating in marginal the meanings with the messages. As a result of the mutual contamination between *langue* and *langage* (mediated by thinking), *langage* becomes more flexible, giving rise the Wittgenstein’s theory of language-game (*Sprachspiel*), see Wittgenstein (1993:51-52) and permitting the exceeding of explicit meaning through metaphorical ‘infiltration’⁸. *Le langage* is only a metaphor carrier,

⁷ A special case of thought-*langage* relationships in digital communication is that one of the literature (high literature). The work is the result of the author’s ability to create hypostases impossible to narrate (*l’inenarabile*) through special valences of style, meaning the ability of concepts’ association able to express more than each concept can express, proposing indices of the unit of forms and of “de-conficere” (see Samson 1983:128), from Latin term *conficio* – to prepare, accomplish, complete. The unit of forms is that “unit of prevailing forms, accents and attitudes into a formal variety and into a complex, diverse and reach variety of contents” (Blaga 1994:21). The work can link what cannot be express (*l’inenarabile*) to the experience of the reader. In interaction with the high literature, the reader does not decode only the digital value x of the unit of significance (its denotation), but the semantic vicinity $lim x$ of the digital value, possible to be decoded depending on the context of message reception and on the germinative force of the image described. The quality of the literary text is the quality of *l’inenarabile*, and depends on the analogical addition to the digital content printed on the surface of the paper. The reader, interacting with the text, becomes itself the subject of the narration, being carried by the narrative propensity beyond the issue and the topic of the text, thanks to the ability of the author to narrate, as the Italian semiotician Giampiero Comolli (1983/1998:178) said, within a *language (langue) without any signified*. This is the effect of reading the high literature: the capacity to link the textual content by the structure of holes still not filled of the language, or partially filled in the *inner attic* (i.e. the area of latencies, that are still not conventionalized). *Langue* without any signified becomes the subject of great literature, where the “narration of availability” and the “narration of the lack of availability” coexist. That *langue* without any signified offers for reading a chain of meaning carriers without signified (a structure of language’s holes), through figures of representations that transcend the quality of *signified* elements, becoming *ostensive* elements: „(...) what I feel is that <somewhere else is here, I am here and somewhere else>. In this <and>, in this <is> there is the difference that thinking, exceeding the hermeneutics of ostension, continues even if nothing here is able to be thought; the ostension seems to succeed to show me that empty, endless dark area, in the best case...” (Comolli 1983/1998:178)

⁸ “Metaphors do not only express what we feel, but influence and sometimes produces what we feel. Metaphors intervene between what we feel and the expression of what we feel,

without containing it. The metaphor belongs equally to nature, *langue*, representational field and production environment, representing a kind of amniotic fluid for the elements included into a model of communication drawn through the agency of the theory of concept-holes.

3. Towards a new communicational model

‘Total communication’ is thwarted because of some limitations: 1) in case of naming everything that can be named, both real and imaginary (i.e. having an infinite lexis), the implementation of such a conventional extension and of such an area of language coverage by uncontrolled multiplying of convention terms would be impossible; 2) considering such a possibility, maintaining the area of language coverage would be impossible, as language and thinking are fertile; 3) maintaining the same practical possibilities of encoding/decoding would be impossible. Essentially, *langue*’s meanings are dynamic because thinking related to *langue* is dynamic and constantly changes its perspective. The self-referential availability of *langue* has an auto-poietic role, of self-controlling and self-germination.

The model of communication derived from the theory of concept-holes can be defined if only the holistic, autonomous and relationship-based structuralist perspective refer to *langue* in Benveniste’s terms, and not to *langage*. In this case, the relationships of thinking with *langage* are to redefine, based on a model of communication underpinning:

- encoding is limited to:
 - cutting of static hypostases to be operated;
 - transferring the analogue data into digital data (gaining as storage space, but missing relevant information, understood as being redundant), respectively
- decoding involves:
 - transferring digital data into analogue data (reconfiguration of the lost information);
 - placing the decoded static sequence into the dynamic process of thinking.

because they transform our feelings in what these feelings really are through what metaphors express. Metaphors possess the quality of an intervention with creative character. They are contained in what we really feel. (...) <The metaphor does not talk about feelings, it incorporates them>”, notes Rainer Schubert (2002:81).

Thereby, laying the foundation of building the model of communication, we take into account the possibilities of meanings negotiation both in limits of the same cultural/linguistic matrix, and between different cultural/linguistic matrices. Starting from Michel Bréal's concept, *the latent ideas of language (langage)*, we can set limits of adaptation and understanding:

The spirit penetrates matter and fills the holes and interstices even. Not allowing to a nation other ideas than those that are formal represented, we probably risk to neglect what is more vivid and original in its intelligence. Since idioms do not agree each other in what they express, they can differ in what they presuppose. It is not enough to analyze the grammar of a particular language or to assign etymological value to its words in order to understand the structure of a language. In order to understand it, we have to get into the way of thinking and feeling of a nation (Bréal *apud* Samson 1983:127).

Within the theory of concept-holes, starting with the sixth statement: 'Common communicative patterns can be found in different cultures; therefore, intercultural communication can start with the setting of common concept-holes structure' (Lesenciuc 2012:175), a selection grid for common patterns can be built, able to exceed the structure of *langue*, its syntax and its etymological approach, in order to be based on the fundamental process of shaping the concept-holes through thinking. This interaction between languages and cultures is a mandatory hybridization, especially in the case of the coexistence of cultures for longer periods in the same cultural space. Thinking, understood as linking element between the human being and the structure of concept-holes of his own *langue*, implies in intercultural communication a particular code of selection of the cultural holes which the communication partner makes reference to. However, when there are fundamental differences between the structures of holes, the intercultural communication becomes syncopated. Each of these 28 words (concept-holes in Inuit language) referring to snow⁹ are difficult to

⁹ The Europeans, in whose languages haven't been shaped the concept-holes specific to the 28 „realities” expressed by the Inuit term „snow” cannot distinguish between *ayak* (snow fallen on clothes), *akillukkak* (soft snow), *aniu* (treaded snow), *aniuk* (snow that can be used as water), *apingaut* (first snow), *apirlaat* (recently fallen snow), *aoun* (snow), *apusiniq* (snow from drifts), *aput* (snow on the ground), *aputitaq* (patch of snow), *iluq* (thin layer of snow out the window), *imalik* (aqueous snowflakes), *kaiyuglak* (snow on waves), *kannik* (snowflake),

understand, for the (continental) European speaker, as difficult as it is to understand the different forms (the associated concept-holes) of the verb *to be* in Ewe language: *nyé* (a transitive verb, *to be someone, to be something*), *le* (*to exist*, relative to space, quality, temporality), *wo* (*to be*, producing an effect), *du* (*to be something, to have a status, a dignity*, ex. *du fia – to be king*) and *di* (*to be into a state, to possess a psychical quality*, ex. *di ku – to be hungry*), each of them perfect distinct from the other ones, verbs that could be linked each other only by our linguistic usages (Benveniste 1966:70-71).

Within such a framework of relationships thinking – *langue* - *langage*, a representative schema for the model of interpersonal communication, continuing the psychologists models of communication opened by Wendell Johnson (1948/1975:301-302), can be drawn as follows:

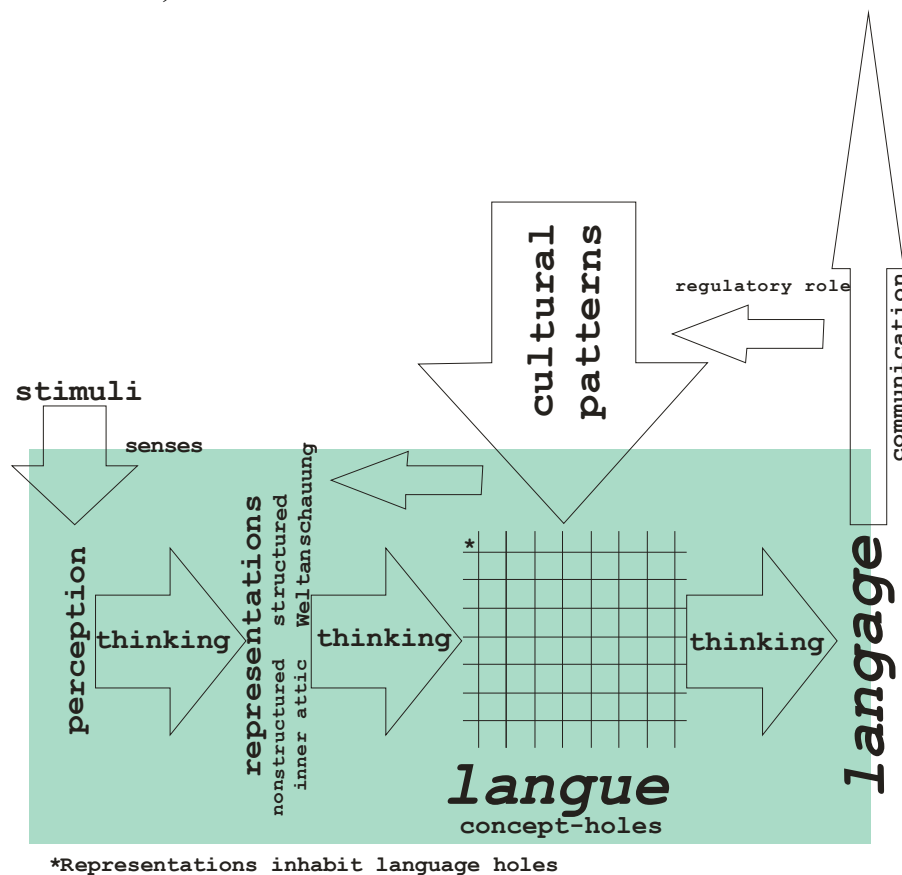


Fig. 1 Model of communication based on the theory of concept-holes
(apud Lesenciuc 2006:9)

katiksugnik (light snow you can leave traces), *katisunik* (light snow), *massak* (aqueous snow), *milik* (fine snow), *miulik* (sleet), *nittaalaq* (dense snow in the air), *nutagak* (powdery snow), *perksertok* (snow in the wind), *pokaktok* (snow like salt), *pukak* (snow like sugar), *sillik* (frozen snow), *sisuuk* (avalanche), *sullamiq* (snow blown by wind), *qaniit* (snow in the air).

4. Conclusions

We can understand that the structure of representations equally contains the structured content of thinking and the intentional one – untranslated under the verbal patterns, as Johnson (1948/1975) explained in his model¹⁰ –, that is latent and unstructured. Moreover, thinking has an important role in predetermining communication flows, i.e. the linguistic field lines that characterize the language (*langage*), based on cultural predeterminations, i.e. language concept-holes, and on the personality print of each individual that is subject to linguistic experiences within his own culture and language or within a foreign culture and language. The most important phenomenon that comes out from this schema is the minor (superficial) role of communication within the entire indivisible process of perception, representation, signification and communication. Nevertheless, communication based on language (*langage*), has a regulatory role, like a valve, in the entire above mentioned process.

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¹⁰ Wendell Johnson describes the process of communication as follows: “1. An event occurs – 2. which stimulates Mr.A through eyes, ears, or other sensory organs, and the resulting 3. nervous impulses travel to Mr.A’s brain, and from there to his muscles and glands, producing tensions, preverbal “feelings”, etc., 4. which Mr.A then begins to translate into words according to his accustomed verbal patterns, and out of all the words he “thinks of” 5. he “selects”, or abstracts, certain ones which he arranges in some fashion, and then 6. by means of sound waves and light waves, Mr.A speaks to Mr.B ,7. whose ears and eyes are stimulated by the sound waves and light waves respectively, and the resulting8. nervous impulses travel to Mr.B’s brain, and from there to his muscles and glands, producing tensions, preverbal “feelings”, etc.,9. which Mr.B then begins to translate into words according to his accustomed verbal patterns, and out of all the words he “thinks of” 10. he „selects”, or abstracts, certain ones which he arranges in some fashion, and then Mr.B speaks, or acts, accordingly, thereby stimulating Mr.A – or somebody else – and so the process of communication goes on, and on...”, within the article *The Communication Process and General Semantic Principles*, published in Wilbur Schramm, *Mass Communication*, 2nd edition. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975, pp.301-302, taken from *Speech and Personality*, published in *The Communication of Ideas*, New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, in 1948.

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METAPHOR, PLAUSIBILITY AND IMAGE IN NEWSPAPER OPINION PIECES

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***Abstract:** Newspaper opinion pieces are instances of persuasion texts, in which the choice of particular linguistic tools is extremely important. This paper explores the use of cognitive metaphorical expressions and the construal of particular discourses for persuasive ends. An opinion piece has been chosen to discuss how metaphors can be intentionally employed to affect readership's perception of arguments and help writers of such pieces build a positive image as well as forward elements of argumentative plausibility in them. Various metaphorical expressions from different source domains are analyzed to investigate Muslims misrepresentation in the UK press and particular ideological positioning related to Islam at the time the article in question was written.*

***Keywords:** metaphor, image, opinion pieces, persuasion*

Introductory remarks

It is a very common practice in newspaper opinion pieces that writers attempt to construct their article in a way that it will have a satisfactory and influential impact on their readership. There is a number of factors which can enable this and a number of methods that they can employ. The overall structural organization of an opinion piece, at all the linguistic and argumentative levels, is one of the most relevant. It needs careful structuring both at the micro and macro levels, in which the choice of various linguistic devices is of particular importance. Since newspaper opinion pieces are instances of persuasion texts, particular linguistic tools employed carry specific weight, and are arguably intended to build a positive and plausible image of the writer for persuasive ends.

Some scholars highlight the fact that metaphor is a powerful linguistic tool in this regard, since it enables particular human thinking and the construal of particular discourses in texts (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Hart 2008; Chilton 1996). As it is observed (Machin & Mayr 2012: 163), metaphor is “a

fundamental part of human cognitive processes”, which influence the way people perceive and understand specific things and concepts with reference to others (Fairclough 1995). In addition, metaphor is seen as a linguistic tool for experiencing the world, as it would be the case when language users attempt to argue in favour or against something and build a plausible argument and positive image.

For instance, in one of my recent studies (Toska 2014), I have analysed some metaphorical uses such as *a wave of mass immigration from Bulgaria and Romania, the flood of new arrivals* or *Romanians and Bulgarians will invade British shores* to deal with identity/alterity duality in language. The writers of the articles these examples were taken from attempted to sound persuasive with their arguments, and instead of using alternative words such as *many* or *a lot of*, they resorted to very common metaphoric words related to water (*a wave of, the flood of* and *shores*) (Ana 1999; Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Gabrielatos; Baker 2008), portraying immigrants as threads and “symbolizing the loss of control over immigration” (Flowerdew 2012: 180). Also, the plausibility of arguments and the writer’s image creation through metaphorical devices is related to the incompatibility of semantically “deviant” usages of language, “resolved by constructing a target meaning which the speaker apparently intended to convey” (Radden, Köpcke, Berg, & Siemund 2007: 8) and sound persuasive.

Since newspaper opinion pieces are argumentative *per se* and since they are supposed to include persuasive elements, some metaphors can be wisely employed to produce the desired communicative effects for persuasive ends. Indeed, they can be extremely important and difficult to challenge considering the fact that some of them have become naturalized and commonsense in language (Semino 2008).

Data

To show how metaphorical uses enable the writer’s image and the plausibility of arguments presented in newspaper opinion pieces, I have chosen the piece entitled *It’s time the media treated Muslims fairly*, written by Miqdaad Versi, appearing on *The Guardian* website on September 23, 2015. The full text is reproduced in the Appendix A. the numbers in square brackets in the article and in the examples analysed refer to paragraph numbers. Bold has been used for metaphors under discussion in these passages.

Discussion

The second part of the paper analyses only some of the most relevant metaphorical expressions encountered in the opinion piece, which argues against the unfair coverage of Muslims in the British media. The article is well structured, coherent and argumentative providing sound reasons to support the writer's stance on the matter. As we will see, most of the uses of metaphorical expressions in the text contribute to strengthen the arguments forwarded both at the local and global plane of the article, but, more importantly, they direct the readership to the desired cognitive process of perceiving things and events as described. Although this can be approached from a critical discourse analysis perspective, it would be more appropriate in this short article to investigate how and why some of these metaphors transfer meanings from one abstract conceptual domain to a more concrete one in order to create plausibility in the text along with the positive and reliable writer's image or persona.

Readers of the piece are expected to perceive the state of affairs in their country as dramatic and threatening. The headline of the article denotes that the unfair media treatment of Muslims is dividing the society. The metaphor, and the hyperbolic expression, *tearing society apart* connotes the violent and immediate breaking of the unified British society.

It's time the media treated Muslims fairly

When a study finds that nearly all stories about Muslims are negative it's clear this is the last acceptable form of bigotry – and it's **tearing society apart**

The headline does anticipate readers with a problematic situation caused by the media coverage, and, in fact, it is soundly supported in the rest of the piece.

For instance, there are three instances in the text referring to headlines through pejorative and metaphorical expressions (*incendiary*, *odious* and *clickbait*), as exemplified below:

[1] Hats off to the Mail on Sunday for finally apologizing for its **incendiary** headline: "Muslim gang slashes tyres of immigration-raid van".

[3] ... the **odious** headline had already spread across the internet like wildfire.

[4] We know sensationalism sells, especially online, where news sources use **clickbait** headlines and copy to attract readers in a crowded marketplace.

Each of them denotes meanings and feelings likely to appeal to the element of *pathos* the writer is trying to convey to the readership. *Incendiary headline* can be conceptualized as being a phrase that would cause damages, *odious headline* transmits the feeling of extreme unpleasantness and *clickbait headlines* involves intentional misleading orientation. These metaphors certainly contribute to the plausibility of the overall argumentation.

The content and the nature of the last two headlines are further elaborated by the writer in the respective paragraphs, in which cases more metaphorical expressions have been used. *Hideous headline* used in paragraph [3] makes reference to the death of 87 Muslims killed by a giant crane and operated by Bin Laden firm on the anniversary of 9/11 attacks. The unpleasant claims are described by the writer as having had a negative effect over the Internet by the use of metaphor *spread across*, and the situation can have some serious consequences connoted by *wildfire*.

[3] The newspaper did eventually remove the 9/11 reference, and later the Bin Laden link. But the damage was done: the **odious** headline had already **spread across** the internet like **wildfire**.

Similarly, *clickbait headlines* are related to negative effects that have on the readership. They are served as goods and services worth the value in the readership environment. *Sensationalism sells* and *crowded marketplace* have been wisely employed to make the argument sound more plausible and to get closer to the readers. Also, the content of the article has been described as a story or reporting similar to the made-up prose for literary purposes that have basically artistic and intellectual values. So, the metaphor *narrative*, used twice, diminishes the importance of the article content.

[4] Should Muslims – and society more broadly – just accept this bigotry? We know sensationalism **sells**, especially online, where news sources use **clickbait** headlines and copy to attract readers in a crowded **marketplace**. And what better way to get people to read an article than by linking it to the **far-right narrative** that Islam is evil, and that its adherents need to be

civilised to become “good Muslims”? It’s a **narrative** that many Muslims feel is often reflected in government rhetoric as well.

In the fifth paragraph the writer makes again use of the metaphor *spread*, as in the third one. But this time the negative depiction of Muslims transmitted to people becomes a more serious problem, since it is converted to ideological positioning and supported by Islamophobic rhetoric. This is also perceived as something increasing in importance and likely to continue in the future, as the adjective *vital* connotes in the following passage.

[5] According to an Islamophobia Roundtable in Stockholm, held in June last year, and featuring world-renowned experts on the topic, the regular association of Islam and Muslims with crime and terror in the media and on the internet is **vital** to the **spread** of Islamophobic rhetoric.

In the last three paragraphs, before the writer comes to his own suggestions as to what can be done to improve the situation, more arguments are provided. Paragraphs [6] and [7] aim at humanizing Muslims and highlighting the fact that they are not only treated unfairly but also ostracized and marginalized in the British society. Two very powerful metaphors have been used in this regard: *alienated* and *othering*.

[6] ... 37% of British people who were surveyed admitted they would support policies to reduce the number of Muslims in the country. Is it any wonder that more and more Muslims feel **alienated**?

[7] This “**othering**” of Muslims has also manifested itself in a growth in hate crime: a 70% rise in the past year according to the Metropolitan police. We now live in a country where most Muslims know someone who has suffered from Islamophobic hate or abuse.

Both *alienated* and *othering* connote that Muslims are seen as if they were coming from other planets and were not similar to the rest of the British society. This is very much in line with the persuasive effects that the writer wishes to create on the readers. While in paragraph [8], the author returns to his initial claims related to the unfair treatment of Muslims. The metaphor *angle* is employed to connote additional positions that newspaper reports may take, and not the negative one adopted so far, and the metaphor *playing up* has been

chosen to derogatorily refer to the British media racialised attitude towards Muslims.

[8] Of course, the media should not be held responsible for violence against Muslims – that is the liability of the attackers. But with over 90% of reports about Muslims taking a negative **angle** and **playing up** faith, even when irrelevant, it is not reasonable to deny that the media plays a key role in the development of anti-Muslim hatred.

The last three paragraphs make use of some other important metaphorical expressions, chosen to help the writer offer a solution to the problem in question. In the next extract *build awareness* connotes a situation that is seen as being not properly understood or perceived. Different interpreting elements are not represented as a whole, and they are perceived as disconnected and not in harmony with each other. The act of building requires careful planning and proper implementation, something which, in the writer's view, lacks in newspaper reports.

[10] First, **build awareness**. ... The lack of comprehension on a topic that is part of the **bread and butter** of newspapers today is **deeply** distressing and its role in editorial decision-making cannot be understated. I would like to think that this is due to sheer ignorance rather than **pure** malice, which is much harder to tackle.

The rest of the metaphors also help the writer sound more persuasive in his argument. So, *bread and butter* suggest that such reporting with the lack of topic comprehension cannot be accepted, since it is supposed to be the basic activity of newspapers. *Deeply* and *pure* depict a situation as being really problematic, since they invite readers to question writers intentionality in describing Muslims pejoratively.

Also, the effect of *combat* and *this gap* in the next passage is in line with what I briefly discussed previously. *Combat*, as one of the most common metaphors, suggests a very problematic and threatening state of affairs and directs the readership to perceive it as war between the appropriate and the inappropriate reporting. *This gap* complements what the *build awareness* metaphor connotes in the previous example. The lack of awareness is followed

by the lack of talent in newspaper Muslim reporting, a claim which makes the writer's argument even more plausible and sound.

[11] Second, diversity. There is an under-representation of all minority groups, but particularly Muslims, within the media – especially within senior positions – and greater diversity will improve coverage and help **combat** misreporting. This requires greater outreach on the part of media organisations to bring in talent from all backgrounds through diversity programmes, paid internships and fast-track schemes to proactively close **this gap**.

In the next paragraph the writer again reinforces the idea that the negative representation of Islam and Muslims in the British media is part of a number of factors which need to be clarified in the future. Again this case is metaphorically depicted as a confusing situation, comparing that to a *jigsaw*, whose pieces are separated and need to be put together in order to have the appropriate picture.

[12] The final piece in the **jigsaw** is regulation. Clause 12 of the Editors' Code of Practice says: "Details of an individual's race, colour, religion ... must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story." The problem is that this protection only extends to individuals and not to groups, which is why Katie Hopkins was able to **get away** with her infamous comments comparing refugees to "cockroaches".

One of these factors has even been mentioned indirectly in the paragraph. The case of Katie Hopkins calling refugees cockroaches denotes the fact that writer escapes unpunished for her inappropriate conduct. The use of *get away* invites readers to align with the writer's position in this case.

And finally, the last paragraph of the article contains a very powerful metaphor which concisely summarizes writer's attitude to the comments made against Islam and Muslims and their negative representation. They are compared to dirty marks sprayed (*smears*) in order to intentionally damage reputation and distort their image in the UK.

[13] We are equal members of society and demand fairness, not favours. Avoiding daily **smears**, group libel and the violent consequences is not too much to ask of the nation's editors.

This metaphor as well all those discussed in this short article, directly or indirectly, facilitates the perception of the situation in more concrete circumstances and add something more to the arguments forwarded by the writer by foregrounding their plausibility and his positive image to different extents.

Conclusive remarks

Metaphor uses are so familiar with us that it is not surprising to go unnoticed in discourse, since some of them have indeed become second nature. This article attempted to briefly and generally discuss the real interpretative impact that some of them have on the readership. Given the rhetorical nature of newspaper opinion pieces, metaphorical expressions, belonging to different source domains, can contribute to the appeal of the *pathos* element in these texts. I hope to have proved that by analysing an opinion piece which touched a quite sensitive topic on the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in such reporting. Although the very common presence of metaphors in all language use, it should not be underestimated the fact that many of them are employed to conceptually communicate issues related to the subjective human thinking and language processing. As the reader may have noticed, I myself have used several metaphors in this article to sustain my points and to sound more persuasive. After all, as Săftoiu (2015: x) claims, “persuasion is seen as an essential tool for professional success, by achieving both transactional and personal objectives”. And this is very much the case with metaphor, plausibility of arguments and writer’s personal positive image.

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Appendix A

It's time the media treated Muslims fairly

When a study finds that nearly all stories about Muslims are negative it's clear this is the last acceptable form of bigotry – and it's **tearing society apart**

By Miqdaad Versi, 23 September 2015

[1] Hats off to the Mail on Sunday for finally apologising for its **incendiary** headline: "Muslim gang slashes tyres of immigration-raid van". In the piece in question, an attack on an immigration enforcement van in east London was blamed on the "Muslim community" and "Muslim youths" – even though the faith of the perpetrators was not known, nor relevant. This fact has now been acknowledged by the paper, and it has rewritten the story and issued a correction both online and in print.

[2] In the media, using Islam or Muslims as descriptive terms when referring to criminals remains all too common, even in cases where faith has little or nothing to do with the crime. The Times ran a front-page story in March with the provocative headline “Call for national debate on Muslim sex grooming”. There is nothing in Islam that could justify such heinous acts, and none of those involved in this particular crime cited Islam as their motive. So why was this story headlined in this way when articles about other cases of pedophilia made no mention of the perpetrators’ faith or ethnicity?

[3] When tens of innocent pilgrims tragically lost their lives in Saudi Arabia earlier this month, the Mail Online linked their deaths to Osama bin Laden and 9/11 in its headline: “At least 87 people killed ... after giant crane ‘operated by Bin Laden firm’ collapses ... on anniversary of 9/11 attacks”, references that mimicked a plethora of rightwing bigots on Twitter. The newspaper did eventually remove the 9/11 reference, and later the Bin Laden link. But the damage was done: the **odious** headline had already **spread across** the internet like **wildfire**.

[4] Should Muslims – and society more broadly – just accept this bigotry? We know sensationalism **sells**, especially online, where news sources use **clickbait** headlines and copy to attract readers in a crowded **marketplace**. And what better way to get people to read an article than by linking it to the **far-right narrative** that Islam is evil, and that its adherents need to be civilised to become “good Muslims”? It’s a **narrative** that many Muslims feel is often reflected in government rhetoric as well.

[5] According to an Islamophobia Roundtable in Stockholm, held in June last year, and featuring world-renowned experts on the topic, the regular association of Islam and Muslims with crime and terror in the media and on the internet is **vital** to the **spread** of Islamophobic rhetoric.

[6] The real-world consequences of the spread of one of the last acceptable forms of bigotry affect the very cohesiveness of our society. According to the largest survey of its kind in the UK, over a quarter of children aged between 10 and 16 believe Islam encourages terrorism, and almost a third believe Muslims are **taking over** the country. In addition, 37% of British people who were

surveyed admitted they would support policies to reduce the number of Muslims in the country. Is it any wonder that more and more Muslims feel **alienated**?

[7] This “**othering**” of Muslims has also manifested itself in a growth in hate crime: a 70% rise in the past year according to the Metropolitan police. We now live in a country where most Muslims know someone who has suffered from Islamophobic hate or abuse.

[8] Of course, the media should not be held responsible for violence against Muslims – that is the liability of the attackers. But with over 90% of reports about Muslims taking a negative **angle** and **playing up** faith, even when irrelevant, it is not reasonable to deny that the media plays a key role in the development of anti-Muslim hatred.

[9] So what can be done?

[10] First, **build** awareness. According to research presented at the Muslim News’ Conference on “Reporting Islam and Muslims in Britain” last week, there have been improvements in the language that is being used, but religious illiteracy remains rife within parts of our newspaper elite. Until recently, a managing editor of a major national newspaper did not know that “jihad” had multiple meanings, and that “fatwa” did not just mean a death warrant. The lack of comprehension on a topic that is part of the **bread and butter** of newspapers today is **deeply** distressing and its role in editorial decision-making cannot be understated. I would like to think that this is due to sheer ignorance rather than **pure** malice, which is much harder to tackle.

[11] Second, diversity. There is an under-representation of all minority groups, but particularly Muslims, within the media – especially within senior positions – and greater diversity will improve coverage and help **combat** misreporting. This requires greater outreach on the part of media organisations to bring in talent from all backgrounds through diversity programmes, paid internships and fast-track schemes to proactively close **this gap**.

[12] The final piece in the **jigsaw** is regulation. Clause 12 of the Editors’ Code of Practice says: “Details of an individual’s race, colour, religion ... must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.” The problem is that this protection only extends to individuals and not to groups, which is why Katie

Hopkins was able to **get away** with her infamous comments comparing refugees to “cockroaches”. The arguments about censorship and free speech are complex – but Jonathan Heawood of the Impress Project, an independent monitor of the press, believes the Editors’ Code should incorporate Lord Leveson’s suggestion that this clause is broadened to include groups. This would allow representative groups to hold the media to account for using “Islam” or “Muslims” where it was not “genuinely relevant” to the story.

[13] We are equal members of society and demand fairness, not favours. Avoiding daily **smears**, group libel and the violent consequences is not too much to ask of the nation’s editors.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/23/media-muslims-study>)

23 September 2015

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

THROUGH DIVERSITY: ARTISTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Artistic communication appears as a phenomenon with strong relational implications: artwork is born as necessity to restore a non-superficial link between people facing the uncertainty of existence, thus overcoming crippling loneliness. The path proposed by this article aims to highlight how this particular urgency of sociability takes form in a typical communicative dynamic able to be “translated” in a totally distinctive way, easily crossing linguistic barriers of any particular culture. This wanted (longed-for) connection with the primary human experience (the sense) makes artistic production a very useful and effective tool in an age in which diversity is likely to become the detonator of a potentially devastating incommunicability.*

Keywords: *artistic communication, dialogue, cultural mediation, translation, sense.*

Art and sociality

Beyond the romantic stereotype of the loner and unsociable artist, the creative attitudes, in the texture of the concrete collective life, «are perpetually in search of social frameworks and tend to create “sociality”» (Duvignaud 1967, it. transl. 1969: 62) and the artwork can be represented as an expression or «a nostalgia for a lost communion, as forbidden dream incessantly revived by an irrepressible desire for emotional fusion» (Ibid). For the same reason the artist can be seen as the man who «seeks and sometimes finds in the painting, in the execution of masks, in the music or in the dance, the means to express his sense of isolation [...] an indication of a virtual participation, not yet realized, of which the individual, despite himself, is the source and the matrix» (Ibidem: 54).

Following this perspective, we could consider the artistic production as a communicative dynamic that strives to build interpersonal bonds of a particular type, capable of depth regardless of the direct and mutual knowledge of the participants. Interpersonal bonds able to feed «that experience of the other that takes place always in the aesthetic practice through those moments of the

primary identification such as admiration, shock, emotion, crying, laughter, and that only an aesthetic snobbery can take to vulgar» (Rondini 2002: 155).

Only from these considerations is it possible to reestablish also the sense of those creations that are incomprehensible at first sight, justified only by that «violent dissatisfied need of participation» (Duvignaud 1967, it. transl. 1969: 54), which can be translated into religious, magical, political and especially artistic practices.

Artistic communication, as well as having its own peculiar dynamic of meaning, seems also to have a very specific ability to facilitate or create links, relationships, sociability.

We want to try, in this short essay, to shed some light on the links between the specific communicative dynamics of the creative language and its particularly effective “socializing” function, often able to “cross” language and cultural barriers in a surprisingly simple way. From a sociological perspective, we must begin our process of investigation highlighting the socio-cultural foundations of this particular mode of symbolic interaction.

Perception and reception

The perception is that physical-psychic dynamism through which a given sensitive cultural object reaches us, giving rise to the process of construction of sense: we can say that the perception is the subjective manner (for example, the taste) with which each of us evaluates, enhances and holds back communicative proposals of any kind. But perception (mainly studied by psychology) is a complex process that cannot be simply defined within the boundaries of subjectivity: both on technical plan (the interpretative practice of symbols) and on the existential one (the type of relationship that comes to settle between the participants) the individual perception implies a “social background” on which it can start. It is incorrect, in fact, to consider an act of perception as an isolated event, since «it is not that the most recent phase of a flow of countless similar acts carried out in the past and surviving in the memory» (Arnheim 1970, it. transl. 1974: 96). And the memory is inevitably also “collective” memory.

In other words, my perception is never simply “my” but, to varying degrees, it is also and always “our”: it is customary to indicate this second level of perception with the term “reception”, which includes «all those characteristics of the perception that are common to a particular group in a historical, national or social sense, and which are distinguished from those of other groups» (Lissa

1989: 70). The reception, unlike the perception, is the subject of sociology, which aims to identify the «resultant of experiences of many individuals belonging to a particular social group» (Ibidem). In other words, the research on the reception has the purpose to «find how people give meaning to a particular media product» (Sorice 2007: 86) and this construction of meaning is composed inseparably by individual and collective contributions and tools.

Denotation and connotation

The communicative symbols can function, in general, according to “closed” or “open” dynamics and it is just this different degree of “openness” that characterizes the artistic communication. Let’s try to deepen, very briefly, how a denotatively used symbol requires a semantic process other than a symbol conceived in a connotative way. The “denotation” (ascribable to the pole “closed symbol”) is a kind of “first degree of signification” which has «characteristics of universality (the same meaning for everyone) and objectivity (the referents are real and do not lend themselves to evaluations)» (McQuail 1987, it. transl. 1996: 232): an immediate and univocal, explicit symbol. It is a symbol that has been conceived in such a way that avoids any ambiguity, uncertainty, interpretative variability: a road sign, for example, which means one thing and that one only.

The connotation, however, concerns the second level of meaning, the accessory one, implicit, unspoken in the word: «The circle of other meanings that can be brought into relation with it» (Marothy 1980, it. transl. 1987: 120) and finds its breeding ground in the “reaction of the lived experience” of the reader in the impact with the text. In other words, the reconstruction of the connotative meaning of a symbol asks the receiver to risk his/her existential experience. The expression “the lemon is yellow” is essentially denotative: the lemon is yellow for all, regardless of previous experience. The only cultural precondition is the conventional sharing (typical of a social group) of the use of the term “yellow” arbitrarily connected to that particular type of interpersonal visual perception. The expression “I’ll see you at the bar” is, instead, essentially connotative: to understand it, in fact, we need to go fish out the particular experience of “that” bar, an experience shared by sender and receiver. If not, the latter would be forced to walk the denotative way and he would find himself at all the bars of the city in search of the sender.

The connotation, finally, is an evident strategy of synthesis of interaction between the individual level and the collective one: in fact, it consists of an

“internal rooting” (his/her own experience, history and memory, tastes and inclinations) but also and simultaneously an “external rooting”, that is the story, the sensitivity, the beliefs of the socio-cultural context in which one is likely to operate and evaluate. This rooting takes the cases of “collective imagination”. It is interesting to note that with the passage of time, even the external rooting tends to become internal, to be perceived therefore as a personal, individual, own feeling of things.

From the communication point of view, it is important to consider that in daily practice it is almost natural to pursue objectives of clearness and that our usual code tends to get the greatest possible denotation: if at the table I want salt, I will try in every way not to trap my interlocutor with tongue twisters or riddles for having it. But, as noted by Iser, in certain cases you may voluntarily «reduce the denotation of a message/text in favor of a greater connotation» (1971, it. transl. 1989: 46): you can then decide to ask for a greater effort of interpretation, and thus to run a greater risk of misunderstanding on the part of the interlocutor. These “certain cases” are identified in aesthetic communication, in literary, musical and artistic texts, in which ambiguity and polysemy are not just a limit, but a wealth: they stimulate and require the “productivity” and the “interpretative cooperation” of the receiver.

Verbal and nonverbal

It is obvious to everyone that human communication dynamics are mostly built on the most powerful symbolic system by the referential point of view, namely verbal language: unlike animals, humans are able to “give each thing its name”, therefore indicating with pinpoint accuracy every aspect of material or imagined reality. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that non-verbal languages continue to maintain their effectiveness and, often, their central role in human communication dynamics, provoking the question of why men continue to use non-verbal communication, «since they have the ability to use, to communicate, something much more elaborate and complex as language» (Attili and Ricci-Bitti 1983: 10).

The most immediate answer to this question comes from everyday experience: «The different forms of non-verbal communication are more effective and reliable in expressing emotions, attitudes and interpersonal relationships» (Gili and Colombo 2012: 291). The need to use non-verbal languages emerges also in situations where the referentiality (that is, the will to

indicate something clear and precise, with an intentionality in turn clear and precise) is not the most appropriate strategy: we want to say that there are situations where clear intention collides with the ambiguity or the polysemic richness of the object or with the opacity of our conscience or our will.

Some recent communicative trends related to social networks, finally, paradoxically raise the opposite question: the sudden pervasive advance of the non-verbal codes among the younger generation (see the phenomena related to Instagram and, even more, to Snapchat) would lead to wonder if the adults of tomorrow will still use, and to what extent, verbal language. In this case, the images (which immediately are erased) seem to represent a kind of liberation from the heavy moral responsibility to “say words”: it is as if the image or the video clip, naked and unbridled, may exempt the sender from calling them, from fixing any kind of “explicit value”.

Whatever the motivation for the use of non-verbal languages (which are the main codes of the artistic communication) they present themselves as irreducibly more polysemic than the verbal ones: the only exception is the poetic (or creative) language that attempts precisely to get rid of any residual burden of referentiality.

Irreducible polysemy

«Art is a communication and signification phenomenon, and as such can be examined» (Calabrese 1986: VI), because it is based on the use of “pieces” of reality (objects, concepts, shapes, sounds, movements, etc.) associated with the idea that they can be viewed «as expressing, or representing something else» (Griswold 1994, it. transl. 1997: 25). The artistic language, however, has a “special” mode of this reference. There is, in the artistic production, a completely original way of using “symbols”, those signs which give sensitive objectivity to things that are only in personal experience and in relationships. This originality is, firstly, essentially tied to the specifically “sensitive” dimension of each code and, secondly, to the voluntary “noise” of the artistic symbolic dynamics.

On the first side, «the artistic activity is a form of reasoning in which perceiving and thinking are inextricably interconnected things» (Arnheim 1970, it. transl. 1974: IX). In other words, you cannot separate intellect from sense in understanding artistic objects: «Who paints, writes, composes, dances, thinks

through his/her senses» (Ibidem). The modern difficulty in understanding the artistic languages would lie then in a rift between sensoriality and thought.

On the second side, instead, the discriminatory aspect of the artistic act would be in the particular “symbolic action”, «which is a peculiar way of “speaking”, which distinguishes it both from the common language and from the scientific language» (Calabrese 1986: 16). What characterizes such action is the fact that «all contents of art are open systems» (Jiranek 1987: 80). In other words, the artistic symbol can be seen as that in which the “reference” ends in certain vagueness, in a non-obvious, unforced, non-unique connection between signifier and signified: the artistic language reaches a level of “openness” higher than normal, everyday interpersonal communication. In artistic production, therefore, one of the components present in all communication processes (we often forget) is exacerbated: communication is always (at various levels) an “improbable” process. So being the result of different “translations-traditions-treasures” of a lived experience, the artistic communication on one side always requires a translation, but on the other opposes tenaciously to such inevitable reduction: being not comparable to a simple “transport” of “informative” material, it implies a particular and risky “performative” activity of the reader.

Translation, traditions, treason

Tradere is one of those verbs of the Latin language so potentially polysemic to range from an action to its opposite: the act of “passing”, of “handing down” implies in fact a series of mutations at each step of the process, so operational to cause the creation of a new object, not always coherent with that of departure: it is no coincidence that the Italian language derives from this verbal root three similar and different processes as *tradition*, *translation*, *treason*. The fact is that, broadly speaking, any act of communication (tradition, i.e. transmission) is the result of translation and undergoes an inevitable treason. Our “inner” speech, in fact, «cannot simply be transferred to another, but it is always translated, adapted, re-read into his/her experience, and therefore always in some way modified and *deformed*» (Gili 2005: 1).

And this fate, paradoxically, is inherent not only in the final stage, that of the reception, but also in the initial one: the sender, in fact, has the not obvious task of translating into signs what is a merely intellectual, psychological, emotional experience. In practice: he has to translate himself. Similarly, on the other side, «to understand means to decipher. The perception of the intention to

mean is a translation. Consequently, the means and the essential problems of the act of the translation ... are all present in the acts of speaking, writing and pictorial coding into any language» (Steiner 1975, it. transl. 2004: 12).

Same “direction”, different codes

In facing the problem of the possibilities of translation of symbolic codes in different codes and/or through different channels, this latter can be understood in two ways: as a *going in the same direction* (same “sense”) or as a *saying the same thing* (same “meaning”). While the first situation is easily viable, as regards the second, the things are more complex. We believe that many “radical” discussions on the very possibility of translation entrench themselves on unreasonable positions because of the lack of understanding of this basic distinction, central to our process of analysis.

Surely a “wide” perspective is that of anthropology that, with Lévi-Strauss, argues that the thousands of existing languages are largely mutually unintelligible, but also that, at the same time, «it is possible to translate because they all possess a vocabulary that refers to a universal experience (also if differently cropped by each one)» (1993, it. transl. 1997: 80). With this statement we fit in the camp of those who, from the classical thought, were called “universals”, so much discussed in the modern thought: there would be a universal experience, “differently cropped”, but after all directed toward the same “sense”, or directionality. Even some currents of linguistics share this “wide” setting: “Every language projects its own interpretative network on experience, on the world. And yet the extensive production practice shows the possibility of “building” the same sense, using different languages ... the sense lets itself reformulate in another language, even if there is no question of an operation taken for granted» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004: 37).

This operation is not taken for granted because of the fact that each linguistic translation is always also a cultural translation (Monceri 2006) and, for this reason, each operation of translation involves an inevitable alteration, which cannot be masked by creating an object similar to the original: «The only form in which in this case the dialogue may be such is that of the aware interruption, that leaves the other in his otherness, refusing to produce a fusion of horizons (in the words of Gadamer) that would be only the reduction of the other on our horizon» (Costa 2006: 42). But this interruption does not mean closure; rather it becomes an occasion for a necessary and promising openness: «Altering the

meaning that we translate, we leave open the possibility that it alters us, transforms us. As is the case, after all, of genuine dialogue» (Ibidem).

On the other hand, various cultures, «“to not dissolve themselves, need that certain impermeability exists between them” (Lévi-Strauss 1984). The dialogue between cultures becomes constructive by virtue of its ability to ensure a fair distance: halfway between the lack of communication and an equally pernicious excess of communication [...] The impediments to the dialogue arising from undue forcing of the rhetoric of the tolerance can harm» (Scillitani 2009: 86).

What task has, then, the translator? It is, as said, a very delicate operation, which requires great sensitivity and, in a certain sense, a solid morality (i.e. a weighted openness). In fact, he stands as “intermediary” and “forwards” the message to the final receivers – who have no direct access to the original one because they ignore its language – by implementing the sense of the linguistic system that they know» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004: 37). The challenging reflections of Benjamin introduce us to what is the basis of our own research: how should the translator of “artworks” behave? And up to what point is this process possible?

After making clear that communication, in a poetic work, is not essential, the German philosopher warns that a translation that would put aim to convey and to mediate would condemn itself, as a result, to a communicative process, a function considered, in the artistic field, inessential. So, what should he do? Start writing poetry? What has to be unwrapped, surely, is that a good translation coincides - with similarity - with the original, because “affinity does not necessarily match similarity”. Instead, what is to be found is the expression of “the most intimate relationship of languages among them”: in fact, «the languages are no strangers to each other, but, a priori, and regardless of any historical relationship, they are similar in what they mean» (Benjamin 1955, it. transl. 1982: 42). In this way, it is possible that the original itself turn through a “renewal”, able to add a “posthumous maturity also of words that have been fixed”.

And so, «the task of the translator is to understand the work as a task in itself, clearly distinct from that of the poet. It is to find that attitude towards the language in which you translate, that can reawaken, in it, the echo of the original» (Ibidem: 47). The accurate translation does not match the fidelity of

the individual words literally used, because in every language they have their own history and are closely linked to the cultural history from which they arise: such a mechanism is likely to lead straight to non-intelligibility. And then, «instead of assimilating the meaning of the original, the translation must lovingly, and even in the smallest details, recreate in its own language, in its own way of thinking, to look like both – as the shards of the same pot – fragments of a larger language» (Ibid: 49), the “pure” language. In this way the central problem of a moral attitude that is of openness, recurs: in fact, «the fundamental error of the translator is to stick to the contingent stadium of their own language instead of letting it be powerfully shaken and moved from the foreign language» (Ibidem: 51).

The "translation" of the non-verbal

What happens when these processes are applied to the field of creative non-verbal communication?

It's the music production that attracts more discussions, especially in relation to the nineteenth century exaltation of the “pure” music, not translatable into anything different from itself: already in 1854, in his essay *About musical beauty*, Hanslick recognized sense and logic in music, but “musical” sense; “is a language that we speak and we understand, but that we are unable to translate”. More recent is the distinction proposed by Eggebrecht between word and note: «If the sound of a word “means”, the musical sound “is”; the meaning of the note is itself, his translation is the extinction of its meaning» (1977, it. transl. 1987: 37). In other words, the musical sounds would say themselves, according to an order given by the human will.

Lévi-Strauss himself, so “possibilist” with regard to the linguistic translatability, seems to change position when one speaks of music, «where the absence of words makes as many languages as composers, and perhaps, even works. These languages are untranslatable one to the other» (1993, it. transl. 1997: 80).

It must be said that very similar positions can be traced in all other sectors of nonverbal artistic production: «Scholars from different disciplines recognize in visual language a specificity impossible to translate in words» and therefore it is possible to consider «a chimera the possibility to fully translate into verbal language an image, that shows a lot more than what can be said with words» (Faccioli 2003: 163).

On the same wavelength is the now famous response of the dancer Isadora Duncan to those who asked what it meant for her to dance: “If I could say what it means, I would not have to dance it”; (Mahler said the same about his music).

If you cannot “translate”, how can you “understand” or at least “share” aesthetic contents coming from social and cultural contexts different from your own?

Echoing the views of Lotman and Uspensky, Calabrese says that the culture, functioning as a deposit of the socialized information, is a multilingual tank, and thanks to its multilingualism it is comparable with other cultures. Therefore, «between elements of different sizes such as the culture, the art in general, the particular arts and the artistic text there is a relationship of isomorphism: they are similar not only in the function but also in the structure» (1986:163).

If, therefore, the term “translation” is improper and unfit to make understandable and usable an object of art, it is useful to find the strategies most suitable to the purpose: then here check off more refined distinctions between terms-satellites such as “adduction/transduction”, “meta-communication” and “explanation”.

The “adduction” is the action that returns the sense “exact” of the object, a process feasible only in scientific context: «In the artistic field the code, the communication, the form and the content are instead intimately related, they cannot be separated or translated into another code without the message being altered» (Tessarolo 2005: 66). You can then use another strategy to understand the aesthetic object: the “transduction” process, which is borrowed from physics, indicates the transformation of one form of energy into another. There is no question of translation in the strict sense and it is a process that follows, in a specular way, the creative one: «A thought, if transformed into a communicative act, suffers, in fact, qualitative changes as well as in physics when a kind of energy is turned into another» (Bertasio 1997: 29).

More cautious and more realistic then is the agreement on the possible process of meta-communication applicable to artistic objects: it is, even in the most daily colloquial events, a communication on the communication, a meta-message that signals the manner in which the basic message goes intended, «a kind of “instructions for use”» (Gili 2007: 173). It is therefore a mechanism that serves to clarify the meaning of communication, a process that puts more bare

the misunderstandings or the clumsy interpretations and can therefore, paradoxically generate further misunderstanding.

Traditionally, especially in pedagogy, this “meta-communication” (of the author or of the teacher/translator) coincides with the “explanation”, that process sometimes essential (especially in the face of recent “conceptual” productions), sometimes radically rejected by the artists who consider it a violent abuse against their work. We believe, however, that this type of translatability is a nonwaivable level if we want to avoid falling into non-sense: if so, for Combarieu, you cannot exhaust the meaning of the music, but «you can to attempt an explanation, which must not be entrusted reductively to one only science, but which can only come from an interdisciplinary approach (physical-acoustic, physiological, mathematical, psychological, aesthetic, historical, sociological)» (1907, it. transl. 1980:11).

To explain, after all, is to translate: in this all the delicate responsibility and the moral urgency of the “wise men” towards the younger generations is summed up.

The common ground: the human

If the term “translation”, therefore, is highly problematic in linguistic situations, it is even more so for poetic creations: it becomes, finally, completely unsuitable and unnecessary in front of artworks that use non-verbal codes. But then, how is it possible to escape the drift of the pure subjectivism in which the original communicative intention is resolved by simply dissolving in the emotion of the reader? If you do not find an alternative to this intimistic drift you put at risk the very possibility of an encounter, or a dialogue between people, “through” the artistic work.

Our proposal is to use the opportunity of a “large mesh” signification that, leaving much more responsibility to the receiver (the famous “gaps” identified by Iser in the artistic texts), at the same time permits appealing to what is common to all, to what we may call *human*, that everyone is able to call up as a dowry received before each subsequent cultural construction.

It is in resting our feet (even unconsciously) on this common ground, that each of us can experientially experience in him/herself the capacity to enjoy works from cultures, ages, contexts far removed from our own: «This discussion leads to the conclusion that there is a human nature that transcends the culture. This idea does not enjoy good press among the human sciences» (Boudon 2008,

it. transl. 2009: 52). Yet, when we recognize that we are able to understand the reasons for attitudes so distant from our cultural setting, and also from what we believe “rational” (as magical practices or the many modern superstitions, for example), we have to admit that «what is common among all people, we have» (Ibidem: 53): art (cultural product) maintains its value inasmuch as it reflects the structural values that underlie and precede every culture.

The imagery

The reflections of two French sociologists (of different times) are interesting in front of the typically human phenomenon of imagery. Durkheim, reflecting on this capacity, questions quite naturally: «Only man has the power to conceive the ideal and to add it to the real. Where does this singular privilege come from?» (1912, it. transl. 1973: 485). Fifty years later Duvignaud tries to formulate an answer on the origins of this “special privilege” and thinks he can find it in the atypicality of the human condition: «If our substance was actually given to us, and we had it at hand, undoubtedly we would not project beyond what limits us. But we are insufficient to ourselves» (1967, it. transl. 1969: 134).

This “insufficiency” (as well as having many implications and consequences of moral, social, interpersonal, ethical, philosophical character) also poses a specific “linguistic” problem: how to “say” *an insufficiency*? In other words, it must cope with the fact that «the character, ultimately, unobjectifiable of the “I” shows a limit in its capability of linguistic definition» (Crespi 2005: 141). It is everyone’s experience (rarely an object of reflection) that, ultimately, «the “information” contained in the words brings to the surface only fragments of a certain object and of our relationship with it; just as many if not more human meanings remain in the sensory channels conceptually not generalized, immediately not decodifiable» (Marothy 1980, it. transl. 1987: 120). With an effective and concise phrase, «we live and we feel much more than we can say» (Crespi 2005: 23).

In this state of “linguistic suffering”, the artistic communication finds its reason for being. It is the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti that describes, with great expressive power, its need: «The language corresponds badly to what you have in mind and you would say: sure, it does not match, if not quite roughly. I will say then that I was looking for the least inaccurate approximation, the reduction, as far as possible, of that gap not eliminable» (Camon 1982: 11). From this point of view, what Roland Barthes says about the poetic language can be

referred to any other form or code of artistic expressiveness: «Poetry tries to find an infra-signification, a pre-semiotic language: in short, it strives to reconvert the sign into sense; its ideal would be basically to get not to the sense of the words, but the sense itself of things. This is why it upsets the language, it increases as it can the abstraction of the concept and the arbitrariness of the sign and tends to the extreme the binding of the signifier and the signified. This is why our modern poetry is emerging as a killing of the language» (Ragone 1996: 313).

In this, the artistic expression is proposed as the least unsuitable language to express certain experiences that often we connote «as “unspeakable”, “ineffable” or “not given to narration”» (Braga 1985: 121). This strange, inevitable *cul de sac* does not exempt us from constantly trying new roads anyway, because «our intelligence is organized so that we attempt to represent the unrepresentable» (Sloterdijk 2003: 106).

Sense and meaning

Let us now note the useful distinction proposed by Franco Crespi concerning two terms normally considered synonyms: sense and meaning. This distinction, in the artistic field, can clarify many controversies that have marked the history of art, regarding the “communicative” function of the artworks.

According to Crespi, the term *sense* must be understood as *directionality*, a sort of primordial thrust congenital to human nature that perceives the inevitable and confused urgency, over that of an end, also of a purpose. When something is given, sense is given. This push is pre-cultural and informs any subsequent action. The meaning, instead, is a cultural translation, and thus a reduction of the complexity of the original sense that is worthwhile in a given environment, historically and geographically defined.

Through this distinction, the true meaning of disorienting aporia of Igor Stravinsky contained in *Conversations with Robert Craft* could be, finally, understood: “The music does not mean anything”. It is licit, perhaps, to consider music as a language *incapable of meaning* (because then the referentiality of ordinary communication, like that of the road signs, would be enough), but extraordinarily *pregnant of sense*: and man is «an animal that inevitably has sense» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004: 25).

The primary experience

One of the risks of contemporary sociology, but also of the classic one, is to realize the analysis systems of social reality able to work perfectly without the need of contemplating human action, except as a mechanism respondent to inviolable laws: the Comtean dream of a “social physics” that, properly “oiled”, removes the error from the system functioning. The outcome, then as now, is that the social is no longer conceived «as the place where the human lives. The human is increasingly seen as character, impulse, solicitation, bother, “noise” external to the system of behaviors, mechanisms and rules that “make” the society» (Donati 2006: 22).

But, especially in the field of aesthetic-creative disciplines, «it is a grave mistake to believe that the objectification of value judgments can be achieved by eliminating the subject of the evaluation, starting purely from the object. It is possible only by referring to the dispositions of the “primary experience”» (Zenck 1989: 105). It is useful at this point, to wonder about the properties of this “primary experience”, very shabby today, after an ideological campaign which, in the last century, has put in great crisis the same hypothesis of its existence.

But what is it? How and where can we identify this supposed “primary experience”? According to Crespi, this level of experience is crucial to the distinction between human and animal: in fact, the loss of instinctual automatism caused by reflexivity marked the final separation between the two natures. But, since then, this ability to “reflect”, to consider his/her own experience and not just live it, compels man to act totally in his own way: «He is from the beginning constitutively the being who asks questions: “Who am I?”, “Where am I going?”, “What have I done?”, “What is the meaning of life?”, “What is there after death?”, and so on» (2005: 6).

If this is the level at which man becomes such, then it is possible to revise the concept of culture and art in relation to this perspective: one can therefore consider culture as the set of «answer modes, from sensitive men, towards the central questions that compare human groups that have the consciousness to exist: how one deals with death, the meaning of tragedy, the nature of duty, the character of love – these recurring problems that are, I believe, cultural universals, you must find in all societies in which men have become aware of existence» (Bell 1977: 428). And so, if scientific knowledge allows indisputable progress in the path of domain of nature, existential problems remain the same: and if the

attempted responses vary from context to context, all cultures «“understand” each other, since they arise in response to common situations» (Ibidem).

Let's come now to the last aspect of these general considerations: how to “outsource” this “primary experience”? Can we consider art as the “least unsuitable” language for this particular type of communication? Indeed, poetic language «is what most tries to escape the need to determine, often using words with different meanings from those currents, relying on the evocative strength of sounds and using the allusive power of words in unusual contexts» (Crespi 2005: 24).

This is, perhaps, the peculiarity and the great opportunity offered by “artistic communication” compared to any other “ordinary” type of communication. And this is, after all, what makes it able to easily overcome the limits of linguistic and also cultural skills, through diversity. Because, in the end, «all languages are particular, but everyone can, at least to some extent, understand each other. The unity of the sense, which cannot be said an absolute language, transpires through the particular languages» (Ibidem: 27).

Artistic communication, in conclusion, is offered to the fruition of contemporary man as a tool for encounter, among the many available, between people of different cultures and traditions, as an opportunity for dialogue that exceeds linguistic constraints, thanks to its unique and structural communicative dynamics “open to the sense”: it is, if we reflect, an extremely valuable opportunity in an age that “forces” us to deal globally with *diversity*.

It is no coincidence that the most violent actions of those who oppose this possible intercultural dialogue have more and more often as a goal the iconoclastic destruction of symbolic or explicitly artistic values of our civilization.

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LE DIALOGUE DES CULTURES

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***Abstract:** Intercultural communication involves an asymmetry of power and, therefore, requires an effort of understanding and dialogue between individuals. In any cultural interaction one must have in view the dual status of the participants as products and producers of a culture, which was the reason why the North-South Dialogue had been avoided for so long. History confirms that cultures are equal, that each civilization has had its moments of growth, apogee and decline, and that during times the values have been respected, recognized and never entered into conflict. Culture alone remains ennobled, enriched and refreshed with so many values.*

***Keywords:** communication, culture, history, behavior, recognition*

L'état de fait

La révolution technologique, avec ses systèmes d'information très flexibles, a des effets sociaux et culturels que la société humaine n'a jamais connus le long de son histoire.

On croirait que grâce à cette révolution les gens ont une chance unique de mieux communiquer, de mieux se comprendre. Pourtant, Dominique Wolton (Wolton 2003: 9) remarque le fait qu'ils doivent faire un effort pour se comprendre, pour se supporter. L'auteur constate que:

– «l'information ne suffit plus à créer la communication, c'est même l'inverse»... « C'est probablement l'une des ruptures les plus importantes du XXI^e siècle.»

Le monde est devenu un «village global» du point de vue technique, mais il ne l'est pas sur le plan social, culturel, politique.

La paix ne dépend plus seulement de l'information et de la communication, qui peuvent devenir un facteur supplémentaire de tension.

– «l'omniprésence de l'Autre est un facteur aggravant d'incompréhension». L'Autre est une réalité sociologique avec laquelle il faut cohabiter. Les distances ne sont plus physiques, elles sont culturelles.

– la révolution que nous vivons est culturelle. Elle déclenche quelques questions essentielles: à quelles conditions se supporter mieux, apprendre à cohabiter et à se tolérer? à quelles conditions la révolution des techniques de l'information et de la communication peut-elle rester liée à l'idéal de progrès et de rapprochement entre les peuples?

Aujourd'hui, le défi politique majeure est l'obligation de cohabiter avec d'autres cultures, rendues visibles par l'omniprésence de l'information.

La communication interculturelle

La communication ne s'établit pas entre des cultures mais entre des ensembles historiques. Ceux-ci sont définis par la spécificité de leur voie de modernisation.

Une rencontre entre sociétés et cultures comporte toujours une asymétrie de pouvoir: l'une est celle de la majorité, l'autre est celle de la minorité; l'une appartient au colonisateur, l'autre au colonisé. Cette relation de pouvoir est toujours reconnue par le dominé; elle doit l'être aussi par le dominant, qui prendra ainsi de la distance par rapport à l'ordre établi (qui lui est favorable). La rencontre suppose même que le dominant reconnaisse la supériorité du dominé dans certains domaines, qui sont souvent au cœur de son identité culturelle: connaissance de tels textes sacrés ou de telle tradition littéraire ou musicale.

D'ailleurs, les pays qui se sont le plus fortement identifiés à l'universel, à la raison et à la bonne gestion manifestent moins cette aspiration à la communication interculturelle.

A la fin du XX^e siècle, aucun pays européen ne prétendait incarner l'universel. C'est aux Etats-Unis que se développe aujourd'hui ce sentiment.

Il est vrai que les empires ou les Etats les plus vastes et ceux aussi qui sont tournés vers la recherche d'équilibres intérieurs plutôt que vers la rencontre des autres civilisations, sont mal préparés à développer cette communication interculturelle dont ils nient même parfois la nécessité. A l'inverse, les petits pays, situés au carrefour des flux économiques et culturels, éprouvent souvent le besoin de comprendre ceux qui les entourent, et sont ainsi mieux prédisposés à la reconnaissance de l'Autre.

Que suppose la communication interculturelle? Tout d'abord, *un effort de compréhension mutuelle*, c'est-à-dire un acte de connaissance qui cherche à situer l'autre et moi-même dans des ensembles historiques et dans la définition des processus de changement et de rapports au pouvoir. Puis, *un dialogue* entre

des individus et des collectivités qui disposent à la fois des mêmes principes et d'expériences historiques différentes pour se situer les uns par rapport aux autres.

«Le dialogue a lieu entre des acteurs qui sont déjà plus que sociaux, puisqu'ils sont définis non seulement par leurs appartenances et par des rapports sociaux, mais aussi par des droits culturels, de sorte qu'ils sont bien des individus complets et non plus des abstractions,» comme l'était encore le citoyen du droit romain. (Vinsonneau 2000: 9-19)

La rencontre des cultures doit être analysée à la fois par la psychologie et l'anthropologie, car l'interculturel est apparu quand les populations, prises au dépourvu par l'acculturation, l'ont interprétée comme affrontement de systèmes de normes, de valeurs culturelles contradictoires. Des individus ayant des cultures différentes, devaient se conformer aux normes de la société d'accueil, qui se considérait détenir un degré avancé de civilisation.

Aujourd'hui, le relativisme culturel, d'après lequel la diversité culturelle apparaît comme le propre de l'humanité, traitant de l'interaction sociale montre que pour pouvoir comprendre un individu, il faut prendre en compte les aspects historiques qui l'ont marqué, les conditions socio-historiques dans lesquelles il s'est formé. L'individu doit être resitué dans le cadre où il se produit et évolue. Il faut savoir comment il interprète sa propre situation et observer son comportement vis-à-vis des comportements des autres.

L'individu doit être compris comme un être de culture: produit d'une culture et producteur de culture. La société où il vit définit le modèle de l'individu qu'il veut être. Toutes les sous-disciplines de la psychologie se rassemblent pour former les mécanismes à l'aide desquels la culture s'enracine dans l'acteur social et lui donne une forme. Le corps et l'esprit doivent être modelés avec des symboles et de la logique existant dans l'univers socio-culturel où il se trouve.

Les hommes ont toujours manifesté la capacité de se différencier entre eux, de produire des variations culturelles, manifestées dans leurs habitudes, leur langue, les manières de comprendre le réel, les modes de structurer les institutions. Dans leur confrontation avec la multiplicité des cultures, ils ont été généralement gênés par l'existence de la différence. (Wiewiorka 2001)

Le “choc” des cultures

Nous appartenons à des univers culturels différents. Pour certains, ces univers sont représentés par la famille restreinte ou élargie, le quartier, la région, la nation. Pour d'autres, ces horizons représentent les frontières socio-ethniques, politiques, religieuses. Durant une vie ces horizons changent ou disparaissent. Par curiosité, l'homme a exploré des mondes nouveaux, éloignés. Mais l'attraction pour eux lui faisait en même temps peur.

Où qu'ils vivent, les hommes produisent de la culture, une culture dont les formes sont irréductibles l'une à l'autre, et en changement permanent. La culture change une fois avec les sociétés mais “la quête de l'altérité et le souci de découvrir autrui n'épuisent pas le registre des mobiles qui poussent les hommes les uns vers les autres. Les besoins de conquêtes territoriales, économiques, idéologiques [...] à ce propos sont, sans nul doute, à mettre au premier plan. Ce qui n'empêche pas le mouvement dialectique, fait d'attrait et de répulsion, qui conduit les acteurs sociaux (individuels et collectifs) à vivre l'expérience sans cesse renouvelée de l'altérité, d'être une réalité première de la dynamique sociale.” (Vinsonneau 2000: 10)

Le Dialogue Nord-Sud ou Dialogue Pays développés – Pays en développement

Dans un monde qui tend à se rapprocher de plus en plus, ignorant toute frontière, le dialogue des cultures, ou *Dialogue Nord-Sud*, commence à s'imposer comme une nécessité, comme un problème majeur. Il est en principe une concertation générale, économique et culturelle, entre tous les membres des Nations unies, une vaste discussion sur un pied d'égalité entre les peuples développés et les peuples en développement.

D'ailleurs le débat commence aux années 60. A l'époque, les sociétés ont traversé des changements culturels considérables. Il s'agissait d'un nouveau type de société, de «nouveaux moments sociaux» d'un nouveau type d'acteurs sociaux autres que les ouvriers: ceux qui s'en prennent non plus aux formes de domination qui s'exercent au sein des rapports de production industrielle mais à la manipulation des besoins et de la culture par des appareils technocratiques (Morin 1968).

Dans une première phase, on observe au sein de ces mouvements un souci de renversement du stigmaté, processus au terme duquel, une identité jusque là

cachée, refoulée, réduite à l'image d'une nature se transforme en affirmation culturelle visible et assumée. (Wiewiorka 2001:126).

Quelques-unes de ces affirmations ou demandes de reconnaissance se sont multipliées, d'autres ont disparu. Les premières ont tenu de la thématique sociale. Dans les démocraties occidentales, aux années 50-60, les débats concernant l'immigration ont eu au centre les tensions attribuées à la différence culturelle. L'immigré était intégré du point de vue du travail, mais exclus pour le reste. La deuxième génération a connu la situation inverse : incluse culturellement et politiquement mais exclue socialement. Elle s'est vue rejetée, victime du racisme, de la discrimination et de la ségrégation, soupçonnée de miner l'identité culturelle nationale, en perpétuant des valeurs incompatibles avec celle-ci. Donc, les immigrants devaient être tenus à l'écart plutôt que d'être infériorisés au nom de leurs différences physiques, pour éviter qu'ils ne détruisent la culture nationale.

L'immigration devient un terreau où affirmations identitaires et demandes sociales d'acteurs dominés se conjuguent et souvent se renforcent. C'est pourquoi dans les années 70 les demandes de reconnaissance culturelle dans leur spécificité se multiplient.

En Amérique latine, apparaissent les mouvements culturels à forte charge sociale. Ils suscitent de la compréhension, de la sympathie, mais, en même temps, la perception est qu'ils manifestent une tendance vers le communautarisme, au sectarisme, au repli.

Les années 80 et 90 ont montré qu'il n'était pas possible de dissocier durablement et complètement ces demandes de revendication à caractère social. Elles nous invitent à admettre qu'en dehors de conjonctures historiques limitées, il n'y a pas de différence sans infériorisation et sans domination. Les inégalités économiques et l'injustice sociale reposent sur des logiques de discrimination ou de ségrégation qui définissent les plus fragiles et les plus vulnérables en termes culturels.

Retenons le fait qu'à l'époque, la question sociale a cessé d'être principalement celle de l'exploitation à l'œuvre dans les rapports de production pour devenir celle de l'exclusion et de la précarité.

L'histoire, le témoin le plus crédible

Depuis 1974, le thème Nord-Sud a réuni 2000 fois (en conférences, symposiums et autres colloques) tous ceux qui doivent en discuter et toutes ces manifestations se sont soldées par un échec ou un demi-échec. (Servan-Schreiber 1980). Et ce n'est pas juste, parce qu'au lieu d'admettre la diversité culturelle comme un phénomène naturel, ceux du Nord ont relégué les étrangers dans un univers subalterne. Ainsi, on a fait que ceux-ci soient perçus comme non civilisés, non humains, non adaptables.

Est-ce vrai? Jetons un coup d'œil dans l'histoire!

A l'époque de la Renaissance, les Européens s'interrogeaient pendant qu'ils exploraient le Nouveau Monde si les habitants des pays conquis appartenaient ou non à l'humanité. Car l'Autre s'est dessiné par le manque: manque de spiritualité, manque de langage, manque de manières. Le discours sur l'Altérité a recours à la métaphore zoologique et a parlé de l'absence: «sans morale, sans religion, sans loi, sans écriture, sans Etat, sans conscience, sans raison, sans but, sans art, sans passé, sans avenir» (Laplantine 1987).

Mais il a suffi de séjourner parmi ces hommes «qui manquaient de tout», sur le terrain, pour connaître leur existence. Une existence qui prouvait, hélas, que l'Autre était porteur de logique, de morale, de philosophie, de métaphysique et producteur de vie, de sens, de culture...

Prenons l'Afrique, le continent le plus pauvre, mais qui a joué un rôle majeur dans l'élaboration de la première civilisation. C'est bien en Afrique que l'Homme avait surgi de l'animal, bien avant l'apparition de l'Homo Sapiens, il y a 40000 ans environ.

Ce sont les Egyptiens qui ont inventé l'écriture, qui ont exprimé des pensées philosophiques, ont créé la religion, la littérature, la science et l'art, transmis plus tard aux Grecs, qui étaient venus s'instruire en Egypte. Les philosophes Platon et Pythagore, les savants Thalès et Eudoxe, le médecin Hippocrate, l'historien Hérodote sont allés s'instruire dans les temples.

Avant que les Grecs eussent passé le flambeau aux Romains, les Sémites du Proche-Orient et les Egyptiens avaient développé en parallèle leur civilisation. Ce sont ces Sémites qui ont édifié, sur les fondements sumériens, la civilisation assyro-babylonienne, l'une des plus importantes de l'Antiquité. C'est grâce à eux qu'ont apparu les trois religions monothéistes, qui, ont eu presque la même contribution que la civilisation gréco-romaine au processus de

transformation du monde: le Judaïsme, le Christianisme et l'Islam. Leurs adeptes comptent aujourd'hui près de la moitié de la population de la planète. Ce qui les distingue, comme porteuses de civilisation, remarque Léopold Sédar Senghor (1993:202) «c'est moins le monothéisme, dont elles n'ont pas le monopole, que la symbiose qu'elles réalisent, dans l'homme, entre l'esprit et l'âme ou, plus précisément, pour parler comme les Grecs, entre la *dianoïa* et le *thumos*, c'est à dire la raison discursive et la raison intuitive».

La Grèce, fondatrice de la civilisation indo-européenne, a été largement influencée par le Proche-Orient et l'Afrique. Sa culture a été une symbiose afro-persano-indienne, soutient Senghor. Mais Goethe l'avait affirmé avant, de sa manière: «chacun doit être Grec à sa façon, mais doit l'être». Car ce qui a fait «le miracle grec» ce n'est pas que les premiers Hellènes qui envahirent la péninsule fussent des Aryens «aux yeux pers» et «aux yeux blancs»; c'est qu'à l'époque classique des chefs d'œuvre, ils avaient déjà reçu, depuis quelque 1500 ans, les apports complémentaires – en sangs, en idées et en techniques – des trois continents du Vieux monde. Et les apports africains, qui venaient surtout de l'Égypte, fécondée par l'Éthiopie, par la Nigritie, n'étaient sans doute pas les moins importants comme le prouve, au demeurant, le tableau numérique des groupes sanguins en Grèce».

C'est en 86, avant Jésus Christ, qu'avec la prise d'Athènes, les Grecs passent, à leur tour, le flambeau aux Romains. Rome va se distinguer par le sens pratique, par l'esprit militaire et juridique. Elle intégrera la langue et la littérature grecques, ainsi que la religion chrétienne dans sa culture.

Depuis la Renaissance, les navigateurs européens ont découvert l'Amérique, l'Océanie, l'Afrique noire et l'Extrême-Orient. L'Europe y a étendu son commerce, ce qui a puissamment contribué à son développement industriel. Ses historiens ont surtout insisté sur «l'expansion de la civilisation européenne». Cependant, les civilisations asiatiques, océanienne et négro-africaine ont, à leur tour, influencé la civilisation européenne.

C'est par l'intermédiaire de la civilisation arabe, au VII^e siècle, que l'héritage grec nous a été transmis. C'est toujours elle qui a fortement influencé, en son temps, les civilisations de la Péninsule Ibérique et des Balkans.

Quant à l'expansion européenne outre-mer, les influences réciproques n'ont commencé vraiment de s'exercer qu'au XVIII^e siècle. Les Européens furent sensibles à l'art abstrait et raffiné en même temps des tapis de la Perse, à leur profusion de motifs polychromes, qui sont d'une élégance raffinée. L'Inde

les attira tard, au XIX^e siècle, par son art mystique, d'autant plus difficile à saisir, mais si fécond, qu'il est au croisement de deux races: des Blancs arias et des Noirs dravidiens.

N'oublions l'Extrême-Orient: l'Indo – Chine, le Japon, mais surtout l'immense Chine. Celle-ci vendait bien ses produits à une clientèle riche et raffinée: ses laques, ses soies, ses porcelaines et d'autres objets d'art. Parallèlement aux objets japonais, les produits chinois ne cesseront d'influencer les artisans et artistes européens jusqu'à l'explosion de la «Révolution nègre» au début du XX^e siècle.

Face à ce qu'on a présenté ci-dessus peut-on affirmer que le dialogue des cultures n'a pas existé ou que pendant des siècles l'humanité n'a pas reconnu la valeur? Ce dialogue tant clamé en ce moment n'est pas une solution inventée de nos jours devant la différence culturelle. Il a existé depuis toujours, car la valeur a toujours reconnu une autre valeur et même a essayé de se l'approprier. Ce sont les circonstances qui ont changé. De vastes territoires des différents pays doivent maintenant abriter des populations formant des mosaïques culturelles.

Le dialogue des cultures, réponse au «choc» des civilisations

Comment se rapporte l'homme du XXI^e siècle à la différence culturelle, au «choc» des cultures? Tout d'abord, notre contemporain se rend compte qu'«il est temps d'en venir à la symbiose des arts et, par-delà, à celle des cultures» ou, comme disait le Chancelier fédéral Helmut Schmidt, «Nous ne devons cesser de tenter d'harmoniser les buts techniques, politiques, culturels et humains entre eux». (Sédar Senghor: 127)

Pour ce faire, une Nouvelle Renaissance doit, avant toute chose, non seulement faire coopérer les arts entre eux, en symbiose, mais faire dialoguer les civilisations, plus exactement les cultures, car «une culture c'est l'esprit d'une civilisation».

Puis, il nous faut, pour percer la culture, c'est-à-dire l'essence d'une civilisation, commencer par examiner les éléments qui ont formé son ethnie, car,

«A la source de nous-mêmes, il n'y a pas nous-mêmes, mais le fourmillement d'une race», comme affirmait François Mauriac. Ce que confirme cette nouvelle branche de l'Ethnologie ou de la Caractérologie que l'on a baptisée *Caractérologie ethnique*.

Aucun peuple n'est pur, écrit Paul Rivet dans son étude intitulée *Sumériens et Océaniens*. Il montre que les peuples méditerranéens ont conservé un substrat «éthiopien» ou «maure» en Afrique, «sumérien» en Asie, «ibère», «ligure» ou «basque», en Europe du Sud. C'est ce substrat qu'ont enrichi les invasions indo-européennes et sémitiques à partir des fameuses plaines eurasiatiques.

Ce substrat original du Bassin méditerranéen est suggéré par les langues *agglutinantes* que parlaient Egyptiens et Sumériens avant les invasions, que parlent encore aujourd'hui les Basques «leptoprosopes». C'est ce substrat que confirme scientifiquement J. Ruffié en s'appuyant sur les tableaux numériques des groupes sanguins.

Mais dans le développement, la *métamorphose miraculeuse* des civilisations c'est la culture. C'est elle qui crée l'homme nouveau.

La civilisation du XXI^e siècle édifie non seulement le métissage biologique, qui a commencé depuis les grandes découvertes du XV^e siècle, depuis le début de la «traite des Nègres», mais aussi le dialogue des cultures. Et en ce sens on peut ajouter que les Amériques, du Sud et du Centre sont aujourd'hui, avec les pays méditerranéens et le Sud de l'Asie, les exemples les plus typiques du métissage mondial.

Au XXI^e siècle, l'Europe va plus loin. Elle est prête à renoncer à un élément de culture qui l'a accompagnée tant de siècles, pour l'amour de la *connaissance-communion*. L'Art y est en train de remplacer la Religion. «Dans une Europe qui se déchristianise à pas de géant, en partie parce que la religion a cessé d'être une œuvre d'art, les hommes se tournent vers l'Art. C'est que celui-ci est resté le suprême recours. Nous élevant au-dessus de notre condition humaine, l'Art nous met en relation directe, en communion avec l'Univers et, au centre de celui-ci, avec l'Être, pour parler comme Martin Heidegger». (Sédar Senghor 199 : 127)

L'affaiblissement de l'Eglise catholique mène à l'apparition des formes spontanées et individuelles de croyances et de pratiques qui s'expriment souvent en dehors de toute institution établie. Dans toutes les religions on observe la même *évolution vers un moralisme monothéiste*. Le rapport à l'Autre est devenu le critère essentiel de la moralité. «L'individualisme moderne tend à éroder ou à détruire l'adhésion des individus aux institutions mais, en même temps, l'incertitude existentielle augmente et nourrit le besoin de croire des individus» (Hervieu-Léger 1986).

Norbert Elias envisage le processus de civilisation enclenché en Europe à partir de la Renaissance en des termes qui permettent l'articulation du personnel et du collectif, du singulier et du général. Il montre, comme Franz Boas avant lui, que durant les époques, les individus se modifient anthropologiquement, intériorisant leurs pulsions, maîtrisant leurs affects et leur agressivité en même temps que se renforcent les Etats et les structures institutionnelles de la vie collective. La vie collective a toujours comporté des dimensions culturelles auxquelles les sociétés ont dû attacher de l'importance.

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MODERNITY AND CRISIS OF MEANING. PROBLEMS OF PLURALISM

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***Abstract:** This article focuses on the numerous causes attributed by the fathers of sociology to the crisis of meaning generated by modernity in the present century and still topical. One of the main causes is the rampant individualism that contrasts with society and imposes relationships that are often superficial. The notion of “contemporaneity” as discussed by Agamben is, together with individuality, the underlying theme in the crisis of meaning and the problems inherent in pluralism. Social change is a phenomenon that belongs to any form of equilibrium because it perpetuates situational adjustments. A crisis may in fact be an extraordinary event, which arrives unexpectedly and forces a new balance to be sought to replace the shattered one. Crises are fostered by the plurality of options and what comes under society’s spotlight is the tip of the iceberg; it is the scholar’s task to “look into the darkness of his time”.*

***Keywords:** crisis of meaning, pluralism, postmodernity, contemporaneity, individuality.*

Introduction

Modernity¹¹ includes postmodernity, also called “late modernity”. It is one and the same age, “frozen” in different still frames depicting contemporaneity itself in its becoming. Here we refer to the stimulating approach of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In order to study society, the starting point could be the consideration according to which the relational dimension is inherent in man due to his nature. Social order has always been

¹¹ Toynbee (1949) is the first to use the term “postmodern”, meant as a posteriority in comparison with the modern age, but not in the sense of the age coming after the modern following the logic of chronology. Rather, “postmodern” indicates a different way of relating to what is modern, not as opposition (i.e. antimodern) nor as overcoming (i.e. ultra modern) (page 3).

valuable and each age has sought the explanation of social life in the nature of society itself, which goes beyond the individual and imposes the ways of acting and thinking sanctioned by its authority and present in that specific period of time (Angelini 2012).

The detachment of present and past, contemporaneity and history is investigated by Agamben (2008; 2015) who, following Nietzsche's steps, sees the contemporary as the *untimely*: in order to be contemporary, one must not live perfectly in line with one's own time because one would already be late, or untimely. In order to be contemporary, one must look at the dark spots existing in one's time. So someone who is contemporary is one who does not follow the vogue of their time, i.e. what is in the spotlight, but rather what is kept in the dark and goes unnoticed, precisely because it is not illuminated by the trends. Thus, "being contemporary" means being able to go back to a novel present and listen to an inner need.

For Goethe, the greatest men have always been bound to their century by a "weakness", in that the measure of their contemporaneity, that is their belonging to their own time, becomes evident by defect as a result of ineffectiveness and powerlessness. The state of weakness is owed to not clearly seeing what a certain age keeps "hidden", what is the "untimely" that cannot be grasped while it happens, and cannot be anticipated but only understood after the fact, once the dark spot is illuminated. As Buongiorno (2014) writes, this gap introduces an estrangement that, by breaking up, will open the way to creativity, as the latter requires an interruption (of the status quo), a hesitation (rethinking), leading to a critical distance¹² interpreted as fracturing, separating, negative, bonding the person with their time and making them contemporary (and therefore rare).

We could say that the people looking into the darkness of their age are those who, from their time, project themselves into the future, who are able to anticipate the feeling of their time, that is, the "spirit" of it. Among these figures, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel stand out because, with their education and sensitivity, they did not follow in the wake of theories in vogue; instead they investigated and dug deep. They neutralized the lights illuminating their age so

¹² This distance cannot be compared with *epochè* because, in the darkness of the contemporary, it is not possible to set aside what has not been identified yet, meaning the "content" of darkness.

as to uncover what was hidden by that glow, something that is present anyway, even if not illuminated. They were men of their time, but they anticipated what would take place in the future¹³. They were able to see into the darkness of their age¹⁴.

Durkheim insisted upon the fact that individualism “develops continuously through the course of history”. Individual consciousness comprises “modes of thinking and feeling of a very general, indeterminate nature, which leave room for an increasing multitude of individual acts of dissent”. Common consciousness is weaker than individual consciousness: the collective type is abstract, not as well delineated as an individual (Durkheim 2013: 133-134). Establishing a rituality and a society is therefore a collective endeavour. Nonetheless, Durkheim regards society as superior to subject.

Weber grasped the “making” of modernity in its historical development, “fore-seeing” the change its advent would bring about in social structures and cultural forms. He grasped the dynamics that, starting in Europe, would influence the whole world. According to Weber this dynamics is rationalisation, which is a coherent and overbearing expression of a specific mode of human action, the rationalisation of forms of conduct and of culture (Poggi 2004: 61), leading to “disenchantment” with the world and becoming increasingly radical. In his thinking, too, a central place is given to the subjective processes from which every action stems: traditional/affective and rational, compared with value/instrumentally rational. The second dichotomy tends to replace the first one. Human action is always provided with meaning and what matters is precisely the subject, because the same mental processes from which the individual’s action comes refer mainly to data, conditions and values deposited in the historical situation, and in the action of groups bound together and oriented in their acting by collective interests (Poggi, Sciortino 2008: 67). When the “mainstream” of rationalisation is accepted, all the values that are

¹³ Agamben notes that each age has a special darkness of its own that cannot be separated from “those” lights.

¹⁴ An initial answer is suggested by the neurophysiology of vision, which explains what happens when we are in an environment with no light or we close our eyes. According to neurophysiologists, the absence of lights disinhibits a series of peripheral cells in the retina, called off-cells, which thus become activated and produce the peculiar form of vision called “darkness”. Darkness, therefore, is not a privative notion, the simple absence of light, non-vision – but rather the result of the activity performed by off-cells, i.e. a product of the retina (Agamben 2015).

incompatible with it are marginalised and sacrificed. With rationalisation, the enchanted world is abandoned; the way is opened to the multiplicity and immeasurability of values, of the way of conceiving reality and giving meaning.

Simmel, lastly, draws a connection between human involvement and social relations, even though need and attachment to the other are always counterbalanced by an aspiration to self-efficiency, related with the desire to control the other or, at least, reduce its influence on the relationship. In Simmel's view, social relations are potentially conflictual: they always entail a reciprocal effect, so both parties are motivated and oriented, but this – paradoxically – does not always destabilise the relationship, emptying it and pulling it into a crisis. It can also induce the parties to renegotiate the terms, accept the elements that are shared and capable of generating reciprocal satisfaction, by highlighting these instead of the conflictual components (Poggi, Sciortino 2008: 87). The anonymity that strikes groups feeds the sense of autonomy, sociability leads to greater individual freedom and, over time, it becomes confused with the liquidity discussed by Bauman (2002). According to Simmel, modernity increases the danger that individuals and groups do not recognize themselves in the realities they create and in which they move; they lose the ability to control these realities, to put them and keep them at their service. It is, in other words, an alienation (Simmel 1976).

The meaning of change

In a “liquid” age such as the current one, as anticipated, meanings cannot be easily grasped and the incomprehensible turns into a crisis of both knowledge and representations of the crisis itself. Postmodernity has faded the context within which the individual may exist and be recognized. A context with no authority is not capable of guaranteeing the common and shared foundations of mutual recognition (Bellini 2015: 55). If this does not happen, the subject finds himself in a situation of self-recognition that affects the consideration of the self. The social act of recognition has great expressive and social value because it gives the individual “his place in society”, an identity; if recognisability is missing, the individual will fall into invisibility and become transparent (Ibidem: 54). Being recognized is therefore enough to define one's own identity, but does not make equal. When the bond between identity and recognition is strong the human condition shows its basically dialogic character, far from a utopian natural right (Tessarolo 2013; 2016).

Social change comes from unfulfilled expectations: surprise, and not subjective novelty, is the mark of social change. It is a phenomenon outside equilibrium; social change is progressive if the outcomes are better than forecast, and regressive if they are worse (Elster 1993).

In order to have control over contingent situations (feelings or points of view), it is necessary to take advantage of indeterminacy by reinterpreting or redefining the rules or relationships in a continuous process of situational adjustment. In Dilthey's theory of knowledge there is no a priori, structures of thinking emerge from experience and draw their meaning from the relation with experience itself. There is no eternal world of meanings, no rational principle or essence. There is no clear distinction between the rational and irrational level (Turner 2014: 84). There is only the human being, the mind-body unity living in interaction with the physical and social environment; and from this interaction, experience and thinking emerge (Dilthey 1952, quoted in Turner 2014: 85). Therefore, objectivity comes from sharing with the other.

In our age the spotlights are focused on globalisation, which seems to offer the most obvious answer for a global culture appearing as a conquest, and which will allow one to feel "at home in the world". The clash is already taking place, because the search for authenticity that started with modernity, and for self-determining freedom, produces a new subjectivism, in some cases a culture of narcissism, where a loss of consistency affects orientations of value and minimal criteria of rationale without which the very possibility of choosing among many different options risks becoming meaningless, wholly contingent¹⁵. The globalisation of cultures seems to progressively near a point where maximum freedom consists of maximum lack of freedom and globalisation becomes anomie. The modern culture of authenticity that is pursued subjectively is, therefore, not entirely sheltered against forms of perversion of freedom: it tends to translate into social fragmentation and a diminished ability by groups, communities and populations to give themselves a common purpose and reach self-fulfilment (Belardinelli 2006: 212; Taylor 1994: 131)¹⁶.

¹⁵ For a closer examination of the guiding concepts of postmodernity see Tessarolo (2016).

¹⁶ Such self-fulfillment cannot certainly be found following the "*passion du neutre*" (Belohradsky, 1988), i.e. eliminating the scales of values; and the same applies to the "politically correct" that, in its current forms, is not just an element of language connected with respect for the other as a person, but has in fact become an implicit list of prohibitions, serving less and less the construction of the civil community together, what is called *politeia*.

The meaning of the crisis

The word “crisis” has several meanings: choice, separation, decision, fight, critique, but also progress – and, in Dubar’s view (2004), this could be the only guiding concept. Crisis is thus a polysemic concept and from time to time it isolates the semantic components of the notion (Colloca 2010: 20). The crisis represents an extraordinary event of great variability that unexpectedly arrives in a community and causes the disruption of previous balances. It is therefore a state of perturbation in which the community finds itself, or a loss of certainties experienced by a social system, with the consequent need to find a set of rules, even if only temporary, for functioning¹⁷.

Touraine writes that the individual has but two choices to emerge from the crisis: either catastrophe or the creation of a new social life based on the affirmation of protecting man’s universal rights, and not on the redistribution of national income. It is not possible to go back to the past because the crisis was triggered by conducts that turned their back on rational management. It is a matter of either surrendering to catastrophe or acknowledging a new type of economic and social life. The choice is not between past and present, but between a series of crises and a project for the construction of new social relations and new institutions (Touraine 2014: 158). So it is necessary to acknowledge that a crisis is far more than a temporary move and that it helps either worsen a critical situation or relaunch social and economic life. In order to do so, democracy, which transforms workers into responsible citizens, must be affirmed (Ibidem: 159).

The words “conflict” and “crisis” have a different etymology. Conflict (following the friend/enemy logic) expresses an antagonistic relationship where subjects compete against one another; while crisis provides the faculty to decide, choose, differentiate. In conflict, winners and losers are expected; in crisis, what prevails is an absence of hostility and a situation of disorganisation, alteration of the way of acting, a situation of uncertainty and imbalance in the effort to make the correct choice. The problematic aspect highlighted by Colloca (2010) is interesting. Relating to Simmel, who recalls Aristotle, he writes that in conflict the role of a third actor appears, acting as a mediator for reconciliation and leading the parties to exclude what is irreconcilable. If these positions remain

¹⁷ According to Cassirer (1979), the thinking of the Enlightenment had already embraced the idea of progress and break with history and tradition, going toward desacralization of knowledge, rationalisation and social organisation with the aim of freeing men from chains.

immovable, the outcome is a crisis. The conflict may also be the solution of the crisis itself, though, because by evoking the enemy, a troubled society finds new certainties and the strength needed for a way out (new social cohesion, mobilisation of energies). Crises may lead to social changes through civil wars and revolutions, but the possibility always remains for a crisis to be reabsorbed.

The notion of crisis entails a temporal dimension; it supposes the ability to identify the right moment to successfully act, regardless of whether action refers to diagnosing an illness, starting a war or changing a constitution. In the end, it is a concept that demands stark alternatives allowing no revisions.

Taylor identifies the main pathologies of modernity in the fear “about what we might call a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons”, or in “the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason”, and finally in the “loss of freedom” (1992: 10). Facing an increasingly globalised economic universe, the only possible form of defence must be placed above the economic and social reality, at a level equal to that where the global economic system was formed, and that no social and political force may reach. It is the appeal to the universal rights of all human beings, so “the broad idea of respect of human rights must be urgently transformed into new forms of social relationships which are dynamic and not just a matter of law” (Touraine 2014: 158).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1995), the meaning of the current act is constituted perspectively, as the completed action is meaningful in retrospect. Action is guided by a view to a preconceived aim. This design is a utopia in which the actor anticipates a future state, assesses its desirability and urgency and considers the steps which will bring it about – insofar as the process is not familiar through earlier similar actions and has not become a habit.

Civilizations emerge and develop as long as they successfully respond to consecutive crises; they collapse when crises cannot be overcome. A breakdown originates precisely following a crisis between economic and political elites (Toynbee 2003). The advantage of crises is that, if authentic, they revive in individuals the energy to face changes, as is the case with the succession of civilisations. The crisis to which the development or the end of a civilisation may be ascribed is due to socio-cultural changes strengthening or weakening the creative impulse. As Pocecco writes (1996), what is deemed to be rational does not always find a subjective application. The postmodern needs to reconsider the autonomy of the subject, whose only possibility is to act within permanent change.

Difficulties of pluralism in a “liquid” age

The contemporary person lives with complexity and opposition, trying not to be overcome by it and to avoid smashing against it. In this sense, the imperative of complexity lies in the strategic use called “dialogic”, which should be constituted by an indissoluble circle comprising the principle of order and that of disorder¹⁸, of organization seen as the highest and most accomplished form of order and the interactions allowing disorder to become order (Morin 1983: 60).

At times theory must show its insufficiency, and this is all the more evident after recalling and interpreting the theories presented by important scholars, also because we must never forget that we are treating “analytically what was produced synthetically”. In man, none of these terms – freedom, reason, nature, history – despite each possessing an irreducible specificity, is to be found in its “pure” state. In this sense, we say that man is a cultural animal (Cassirer 1979: 79). In its modern meaning, pluralism, together with concurrent processes of functional differentiation, is both the expression and the cause of the process. As the countless values in force today are never criticised or arranged in hierarchical order, but rather regarded as being all equivalent with regard to their truth and value, pluralism becomes a “basic condition for the spread of subjective and inter-subjective crises of meaning” (Berger and Luckmann 1995: 25). If the individual grows up in a world where there are no common values to orient action in the different areas of life, nor a single reality, that is, a common system of notions for interpreting the meaning of things and of human life that is obvious to everyone, the risk of losing one’s orientation is high and the production of meaning by institutions is compromised. Modern pluralism produces effects of destabilising the realities perceived as obvious,

¹⁸ These are all elements that are always present in society as well, and must be taken into account and brought to man’s side. Morin’s imperative is not to resolve the manifold in the one, nor the one in the manifold. In Morin’s view, the regeneration of ethics cannot be separated from a regeneration of civism, nor from a democratic regeneration. Among the ways converging in the notion of complexity, there are all the elements of a crisis, among which: irreducibility of chaos and disorder; overcoming of singularity (and of the principle of generalisation); complementarity of order and disorder; opening up of uncertainty, or crisis of concepts (clear and confused); finally, complexity forces the principle of the non-contradiction of classical logic being overcome and acceptance of the dialogic principle of uni-duality (Fumarco 2009).

highlighting the relative inefficacy of intermediary institutions¹⁹ whose task and role, based on their nature, should be that of acting as a sort of immune system with regard to the disease represented by the loss of the sense of reality.

A sociological reflection proceeds in the light of the notion of meaning, of its place within the fabric of the community and of the risks that may be generated by its crisis. “Meaning is nothing but a complex form of consciousness: it does not exist independently. It always has a point of reference. Meaning is consciousness of the fact that a relationship exists between experiences. The inverse is also true: the meaning of experiences (...) has to be constructed through relational performances of consciousness” (Berger and Luckmann 1995: 11). In modernity, signs of crisis appear precisely in the normative and therefore prescriptive character of institutions and their cultural legitimacy, their ability to fulfil human needs of security and agreement. There is no longer a common reference for individuals and the influence of a specific culture fails because individuals are no longer subject to the authority of the dominating ethics with regard to what is right or wrong. It is specifically in this situation that the concept of pluralism opens up its way in modern society; not only does it allow a choice, but it forces one to choose. Pluralism generates crises of subjective and inter-subjective meaning particularly where it aims to strengthen an individual’s ability to affect society and change it, thanks to the liberation of the individual’s decision-making power.

Man cannot give up institutionalising practices of responsibilities capable of transcending mere biological survival and providing meaning to life as a human life. The answers to the crises of meaning induced by individualistic pluralism often appear contradictory, and they oscillate between a call to fundamentalism and one to relativism. The first may cause closures, localism and interethnic and cultural clashes; the second foreshadows an unmanageable differentialist horizon, if not social disintegration. Relativism is thought to lead to happiness, but it actually stops at the flattery of gratification. In the current situation, crises of meaning remain latent and emerge only in dramatic instances, when fundamentalism (e.g. clashes of civilisations) or relativism (e.g. debate on bioethics) find an expression. In order for such pushes toward desocialisation not to compromise the order of contemporary society, appropriate tools are needed.

¹⁹ By “intermediary institutions” the authors mean associations of a humanitarian, ecological, environmental or similar nature.

The disorientation felt by the modern person is not only an individual emergence, but a necessity imposing the emergence of autobiographical retrieval. In our society everything breaks apart, specialises, is reduced to minimum formats of exploration, consumption and also thinking. Wide visions, macrointerpretations and great projects are lost in favour of the small and local. The complexity due to the multiplication of situations and opportunities, instead of being an enrichment, is lost in a self-referral attitude of the person – Guicciardini's *particolare* – that is, one's own profit. In modernity, fragmentation adds to liquidity and offers an excess of possibilities that paralyses choices.

The theories of “overload” underline that society and individuals choose better, and with greater individual and collective effectiveness, if the variables and risks to be faced are compatible with the material and cognitive resources available; while a worse choice will more easily be made by those (individuals, groups or institutions) who do not have sufficient abilities and resources to transform a crisis into an opportunity to choose with a view to development (Costabile 2016: 107).

With its unceasing production of changes in all fields of human activity, modernity multiplies new opportunities; at the same time, it facilitates crises related to difficult and complex situations where individual and collective subjects are required to make a choice. In this way, modernity underlines the value and original meaning of crisis, which is precisely a choice in difficult conditions; but modernity itself brings about an exhausting repetition of critical phenomena, so much so as to blur, in modern language, the factor of choice in favour of the factor of malaise owed to social and personal lives being crossed by repeated and countless crises (Ibidem: 107).

Conclusion

Uniformity and homogeneity are not characteristics of nature, nor of human history. There is plurality when there are different forms, different manifestations etc., but contemporary pluralism does not equate with plurality because of an important characteristic consisting in – at least apparent – opposition and incompatibility. Pluralism raises problems of coexistence between different forms; one is perceived as a threat by the other, so much so that contrast sometimes becomes a reason of being. This does not mean that

there is no conflict in plurality, because the fight for survival has always existed; such conflict is not aimed at suppressing plurality but at enriching it further. In pluralism, conflict is destructive and aims to eliminate the opponent²⁰ (Viola 2007: 228).

The versatility of the analytical category defined as “crisis” is undoubted. It has the advantage of signalling the loosening of a paradigm and the emergence of new theories, and for such reason it may be a precondition for the growth of knowledge; in sociology, it reveals marked processes of social layering, which manifest how much contemporary society grows (Colloca: 2010).

The risks of thought may be due to a state of crisis in the individual. Enlightenment, understood as a constant progression of thinking, has always pursued the objective of taking away fear from human beings and empowering them. There follows the risk of a state of crisis for the individual, of suspension and ambivalence between freedom and domination (Horkheimer; Adorno 2010).

The plurality and importance of the word “crisis” make for problematic conclusions. In sociology, “crisis” indicates a concept similar to progress, weak as regards the space-time dimension, therefore subject to change. In its dimension of process, nonetheless, a crisis has the advantage of being a precondition for the growth of knowledge²¹. Such growth opens a widening gap between citizens “by excess”, who are able to move in a deregulated and individualizing context, and citizens “by defect”, who are trapped in unstable life patterns, precarious jobs, with no protection from risks and no rights guaranteed (Castells 2002; Bagnasco 2010: 37).

The other side of the conflict, however, is a *cooperation* of a strategic type, aimed at reaching specific objectives, regarded as a moment proper to social individualism. The mobile “us” that is constituted cooperatively is a collective identity always in the process of being defined and redefined; in contradiction with a (global) agreement of “everybody with everybody”

²⁰ The “no global” movement, for example, would disappear if globalisation no longer existed.

²¹ According to Husserl, the crisis does not concern the scientificity of science; there is crisis where the man of science is mistaken for the authentic man (Gessani 1977: 127; Colloca 2010: 30). According to Heidegger, the crisis between science and philosophy arises when the first is reduced to calculation and uses technique to “rape” the planet beyond its natural possibilities; and the second apparently refuses to reflect on the essence of science and technique (Semerari 1994: XXI-XXII).

suggested by a theory such as that of Habermas (1975) where, in the end, the “us” is identified in Kantian terms, or with all of humanity – meaning a closing in a universalism lacking the utopian restlessness capable of tearing it up.

In order to reduce the “disorientation” of the modern man, it is necessary not only to strengthen intermediary institutions, as hoped by Berger and Luckmann (1995), but – in the light of growing social inequality and environmental degradation, appropriation of resources and commodification, and an increasingly disposable world – it becomes necessary to challenge the governing rationale that lies behind these developments and to call into question its foundations and implications in particular.

Seeing into the darkness of our present means acknowledging the “unlived” part of every experience, of which one is unaware. Attention on this “unlived” is the life of contemporary man. And being contemporary means going back to a present where we have never been. Being contemporary is being able to listen to that shadow and to one’s inner need (Angelini 2012).

Berger and Luckmann reflect upon the relationship between individual and society and tackle the problem provocatively, because in their view it is precisely contemporary society that produces the crises of meaning that cross it. These are actually not crises in a latent state, but real crises leading to disorientation, i.e., to the crisis of the modern man, the “homeless mind”. There is no certainty that, in all this clearly evident crisis, in our dark age, a solution is being prepared that is not linked to rigidity, as in the past, or to the extreme liquidity that so destabilizes current society.

Maybe we can hope for a harmonization of experience and expectation that transforms itself not only over the course of history, but also in the “maturing” of subsequent generations. For each generation that follows those that preceded it, and in connection with the disappearance of more mature generations, there comes an opportunity to become free from generational constraints. The natural separation between generations, in as much as it produces history, turns more and more into social change (Koselleck 2009). A consideration is implicit in this view: that the coexistence of subsequent generations will have a difficult “accommodation” with, and an equally difficult assimilation of, the dominant values. This leads back to the issue of relationality and reference to common values, which will have to be further examined in depth and newly processed.

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BOOK REVIEWS

SMALL DATA: TINY CLUES, HUGE TRENDS

Book review of the work Small Data: The Tiny Clues that Uncover Huge Trends, author: Lindstrom, Martin, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2016.

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In recent years, as the digital economy emerges and steps towards the single market are made, companies face the pressure of aggressive competition and shifting consumer behaviour. Marketing specialists worldwide, who are asked to help companies launch new products, create memorable and appealing brands, and retain the customers, in order to increase profits, have lately chosen to rely on big data gathered using digital devices and the Internet when setting foundations for their strategies. In fact, big data has taken over both the business environment and the academic fields related to business, to the extent that qualitative enquiries have become quite overlooked. While quantitative researches based upon big data undoubtedly offer relevant information to business professionals, they also make room for errors due to the fact that ICT related research has yet limited capabilities in providing clues about the subtleties of human motivations and desires.

Martin Lindstrom's book makes a statement in the field of contemporary marketing research, presenting a qualitative research model that he created during his over sixteen years of work experience as a branding consultant for local and global companies operating in China, Russia, Germany, the US, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Brazil, among other countries: the Subtext Research. The model is derived from ethnographical and participant observation, and, as he shows in the pages of *Small Data: The Tiny Clues that Uncover Huge Trends*, helps evidentiating elusive consumer insights that big data analysis is not able to show.

The Subtext Research operates with *small data*, a concept that Lindstrom created in order to give a name to the tiny bits of information that people unintentionally leave around them, and that usually go unnoticed to an untrained

eye, because they are linked to shared cultural backgrounds. By investigating the medium in which people live, by stepping in their bathrooms and bedrooms, by looking at their fridges, in their trash cans, or at the architecture of their neighbourhoods, Lindstrom searches for patterns that are common to a wide array of people in a geographical area. Whether they are cultural or societal patterns that those people share on a subtle level, these clues reveal valuable information regarding peoples' motivations and desires, states Lindstrom, who also has an eye for translating the lessons he learned while doing research in a country to solve problems that companies in other countries face.

On a theoretical level, the author's work is based upon Freud's concept of libido, which relies on constructivism, cultural determinism and connectivism. Two assumptions are placed at the core of the book presenting the model. The first one is that companies are ready to invest large amounts of effort, time, and money to attract customers. The second is that knowing a little amount of information regarding human behaviour can be instructive for companies that embark on journeys towards finding and retaining their customers. Both of these assumptions are realistic.

The book has eight chapters, and begins with a depiction of the personal context which allowed the author to develop the Subtext Research method over the years. Lindstrom offers only a small amount of information about the method itself in the first pages of the book, and explains it in more detail in the last chapter, after presenting plenty of situations when he used the model to increase customer fidelity, create rebranding strategies that lead to sales increase, and launch brands. Lindstrom manages to engage the reader gracefully by giving unexpected consumer insights and making interesting connections between situations in different markets. His examples range from toothbrushes in China to fashion stores in Austria, from bracelet charms to Disney parks, from cereals in India to LEGO sets, from Arabian malls to Brazilian girls' collection of coloured beer bottles.

Although the Subtext Research model is explained well, the level of replicability of the researches presented in the pages of this book is not covered, which might raise questions to a skeptical reader. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the author states that only recently he started to think about making the method more formal and train novices to use it.

Written in a witty and amusing manner, and completely lacking the academic tone, the book is a good read for any marketing student or professional. Martin Lindstrom presents his method and work results in a very favourable light in this book, emphasizing his achievements and only swiftly presenting his failures. The reader might not find this disturbing as the author is an internationally- acclaimed advisor to companies such as Walt Disney Company, PepsiCo, Red Bull, Nestlé, has written six international best-sellers and has been voted in 2015, by over 30000 marketing professionals, as the #1 brand-building expert.

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THE EVOLUTION OF MILITARY TERMINOLOGY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Book review of the work British versus American military terminology. A comparative study, author: Cosmina Drăghici, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2015

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Based on recent research in the field of lexical analysis, the author Cosmina Drăghici (2015), sets the limits and evaluates those criteria that play an important role in the strategies adopted for the development of pragmatics studies (micro-and macro). She does this by creating a model of identification and analysis of lexical information, practical when interpreting pragmatic texts (military ones), which allows complex relationships between participants and discourse elements. Further, the notion of **discourse** is defined in terms of pragmatics, in its most comprehensive way and it includes all social, historical, linguistic and artistic characteristics that help to interpret different types of discourse and to identify pragmatic functions they perform in contemporary society, emphasizing the importance of developing research in the field of textual and discourse analysis that the author has proposed. The proposed method of analysis has advantages that allow the author to manage the information efficiently and effectively in the steps preceding the analysis and to distribute it successfully in the final research phase. In addition, by implementing the method the author adopts, it is demonstrated that for a source text (either in English or Romanian) coherent analyses can be formulated depending to decisions taken throughout the process of interpretation.

The topic is important and up to date as it focuses on the research of a dynamic field in constant change, concerning the relations between British and American military terminology corpora. Given that English military speech has an important role in developing language, and that British and American terminologies have developed differently in the two cultural areas, the analysis of these influences is required and it shapes some certain trends of linguistic

standardization, especially in relation to the specialized jargon, but also concerning distinctions and parallel developments, particularly related to slang. The topic approached by Cosmina Drăghici focuses on key issues related to setting up a theoretical and analytical framework in the field of knowledge and understanding how British and American military corpora have modified and evolve. Through it, not only theoretical concepts have been studied coherently and systematically, in relation to terminology specificity, together with focusing on written registers within the military system of the two cultural areas, but also, the influence of non-formal is pointed out (including the influence of slang) in the development of military terminology corpora.

The novelty of the topic represents the analysis of military terminology corpora that presupposes, on the one hand, a military need to design linguistic standardization (of English language) regarding the participation in various international operations of NATO member states, and, on the other hand, a linguistic necessity of analyzing terminological regularity, derived from specialized jargon, under the influence of unofficial irregularities that requires a broad and adequate socio-terminological approach of real military context of linguistic production. Starting from an issue whose aspects are still unclear from the rational point of view and that requires filling some gaps in terms of terminology determination and analyzing it from a dynamic perspective, Cosmina Drăghici approaches current aspects, that are on debate agenda of linguists and military sciences researchers, all these reflected by numerous and adequate citations. The work has an innovative character, not only as it describes a unique way of investigating the particularities and evolution of British and American military terminology, but also because it brings into discussion the possibility to configure a projective framework to get closer to these corpora, their efficient learning and the rational use of the communication environment within theatres of operations. The novelty lies both in content organization, and in adapting certain theoretical studies that have not yet penetrated the specialized Romanian literature as well as in the use of unique methodological instruments. An important and new characteristic is the proposal of a frame for training/development in the field of linguistic acquisition. The scientific characteristic of the work lies in its methodical approach of the research, with scoring each phase, in the extended documentation, in the rigorous analyses, in the continuous connection to theory, both theories indirectly testable, with a

higher degree of generalization, and to laws specific to certain fields of study, in a distant, balanced and formal presentation, in the rigor of the presentation and in the continuous relation to the goals pursued through research.

These general appreciations are arguments proving that the work elaborated by Cosmina Drăghici is a valuable and unique scientific document in the extended field that concerns researchers in linguistics, but also in the field of military sciences. The definitions of terminology that belong to the specialized vocabulary (in our case military terminology) have a conventional character, rigorous, unambiguous or descriptive. Therefore, the methodological criteria that founded this paper are rigor and precision of definitions, noticing multiple meanings as well as their explanations in relation to their importance and to the needs in practice.

From a theoretical standpoint, the most important outcome of the author's research is represented by the selection, structuring and processing of the material into a coherent theory. As seen throughout the work, Ms. Drăghici starts from an impressive bibliography, which she seriously interprets, choosing elements that lead her to formulating a feasible working hypothesis. She submits the statements to a rigorous analysis, she compares different existing interpretations, explains linguistic facts and evaluates them in light of the theory she has built, brings the subtlest arguments for each statement, checks their validity and selects those in support of her analysis, after a judicious process. Statements made are always strongly justified and theoretically defended. The description is obviously the result of extensive knowledge of the field, after assimilating rich information. The paper presented in such a manner shows us that Ms. Cosmina Drăghici is an accomplished researcher, able to come up with original contributions, after an investigation led with clear judgment and an analytical mind. I consider the present work to be a scientific paper of high interest and novelty, modern in terms of approach and pursued aims, appropriate and useful, equally unique and original.

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