

FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO INTERCULTURATION: CURRENT SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract

Due to the dynamism and heterogeneity specific to most societies nowadays, cultural diversity is a constant of social life. Therefore, different cultural identities, cultural contacts and exchanges, interculturality, but also subcultures and countercultures are, in today's globalized world, features of contemporary societies, characterized by multiculturalism and social mobility. Especially as a result of the new waves of migration and fleeing in recent years, new discussions in the academic field have emerged related to the new contexts of cultural diversity, multiculturalism, cultural integration, social inclusion. The cultural impact and the various contrasts between the native culture of immigrants and the culture of the host societies generated debates and polemics both in political and scientific sphere. This paper deals with the current sociological approaches as regards interculturality and the major cultural processes and phenomena that emerge in a multicultural society. In

this respect, a general framework for addressing these issues is delineated, and notions such as human and cultural diversity, multiculturalism, interculturality, acculturation, interculturalisation, but also concepts of subculture and counterculture are discussed. The current views and approaches in sociology are highlighted and the complexity and the difficulties that epitomise and accompany some cultural processes are pointed out.

Keywords: diversity, multiculturalism, interculturality, acculturation, interculturalisation, subculture, counterculture

Human diversity and its challenges

Human diversity has been acknowledged since ancient times. However, it was rarely a subject as such in the social and human sciences (Jucquois 2005). Diversity, as a reality and as a property of beings and things to exist in multiple and different forms, has over time been framed in taxonomies that followed the specificities of certain civilizations and epochs, and often these classifications had the role to clarify the differences and to justify the existing hierarchies and social order.

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, the scientific approach to diversity went through several paradigms, from the vision of linear historical progress that “scientifically”²⁰ justified colonialism, to promoting the idea that not all human “races” have reached the same stage of development, therefore the “upper race” (whites) must assume the role of teaching and civilizing the “inferior races”, and to the deeper reflection that followed the two disasters created by world wars in the first part of the 20th century.

²⁰ The quotation marks used in this paragraph for references to “races”, including the justification, considered at that time “scientific”, of different hierarchies, are meant to mark the distancing of the author of this paper from these ideas.

Currently there is no unified approach to diversity in the various socio-human sciences (Schultze 2009, Wieviorka 1998). However, there is an agreement that diversity is still the risk factor of potential major conflicts, and it finds itself in the nucleus of still persistent imbalances in the world, in ethnic and nationalist claims, totalitarian derivations or various forms of violence in societies, which leads to the need to create – or refine, where it already exists – systems of political and citizen regulation based on pluralism. However, this finding remains at the stage of a rather abstract goal.

Neither at a political nor at a scientific level, concrete answers were found to the question: which are the mechanisms through which the peaceful coexistence of groups and communities, whose values, beliefs, desires, projects and interests are different, would be possible? The stake of these answers is enormous, given the acute current problems that divide societies and threaten the existence of entire communities (Jucquois 2005, 214).

Cultural diversity in societies that have received new waves of immigrants and refugees raises a number of practical and political difficulties. The problems faced by these societies show that, at least at present, the past models of the political approach to diversity are no longer working. That is why it appears currently as necessary to conceive new models, adapted to the new conditions and functional in the current situation. One should be also aware about the stringency of finding such solutions. This process proves to be difficult, given that it implies not only solutions that involve structural changes, that can be decided at political and administrative level, but also – above all – solutions that involve socio-cultural changes, that is, at the level of values, norms, symbolic representations, mentalities, and this is the level at which changes are the slowest and most difficult in a society.

Multiculturalism and cultural identities

At a general level, the term of “multiculturalism” designates the coexistence in a society of several different cultures, and at a more specific level the social response to the multitude of concrete problems generated by the coexistence of populations perceived as – or which consider themselves as – different (Policar 2005, 451). The first experiences of institutionalizing of multicultural actions and implementing such policies took place in Canada, Australia and Sweden (ibid., 450). For example, in Sweden, an immigration country for Finns and Yugoslavs in the 1970s, the multiculturalist policy adopted in 1975 was based on three fundamental principles (ibid.): equality between minority groups and the majority population in terms of living standards; the freedom to choose between the identity of the own ethnic group and the Swedish cultural identity; ensuring lucrative labour relations for the Swedish economy’s productivity. As can be seen in this example, as well as from the Canadian and Australian experiences, there was an indissoluble link at the level of politics between cultural particularism and participation in economic life, which drew M. Wieviorka (1998) to talk about “integrated multiculturalism”. By using this term, Wieviorka described the phenomenon through which the social and cultural demands of the minority groups are interconnected, as are the general economic needs of the host country and its political and moral values (Wieviorka 1998, 238).

On the other hand, experiences in the USA have determined other forms of policies, which Wieviorka characterizes as “crumbled multiculturalism” (ibid., 244). Thus, the institutionalization of multiculturalism followed in this country two distinct types of logic: one of a socio-economic nature, and another of an identitarian nature. The first logic characterized the so-called affirmative action policy, whose goal was social equality. In this logic, there have been taken, among others, measures of positive discrimination, such as quota policies and countervailing measures

designed for ethnic minorities and women. And yet – and hence the associated criticisms and malfunctions – from such policies did not benefit individuals regarded as disadvantaged or impaired, but abstract collective entities. The second logic, that of policies of recognition, aimed at the acknowledgment of cultural differences as an essential expression of human dignity. Such policies implied obtaining political recognition of rights and privileges based on ethnicity, but also, at a meta-level, the acquisition of a better social visibility and a more equitable access to the public space arena (Policar 2005, 451).

Cultural identities are being constructed and reconstructed not only by learning the norms and internalizing the values within the own group, but, above all, by comparing with other groups, and the main sociological mechanism that allows this comparison is the cultural contact (Azzi and Klein 1998, 77). In this context, there are made references to notions such as “interculturality” and “acculturation”, through which the interaction between two or more cultures, with all the involved exchanges, combinations, takings over, but also rejections and conflicts, is designated, as well as the term of “interculturalization”, which is used to indicate the awareness and the recognition of cultural differences in a society.

Interculturality, acculturation and interculturalization

The human cultural diversity in a given society is often referred by using the concept of interculturality. Originally, this term designated the multitude of relations between cultures, thus rather involving a static vision regarding culture. Currently, the term has acquired more complex connotations, referring to the relations that exist within a society between the majority and the minority groups in terms of culture (Dietz 2018, 1), thus including the relations with regard to ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, customs, rituals etc.

In contrast to the references of the concept of multiculturalism or the alternative notion of “multiculturality”, which highlight the coexistence in a society of several different cultures, interculturality indicates rather the power balance that acknowledges who belongs to the majority and who is “stigmatized” as a minority (Dietz and Mateos Cortés 2011). The relations between the majority-minority constellations are mainly asymmetrical in respect of political, social and economic power, and they frequently reflect historically patterns of denying diversity, stigmatizing otherness, or discriminating particular groups (Dietz 2009).

Until recently, Western societies denied to a greater or lesser extent the heterogeneity (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 334). Their interculturality or cultural contact with the so-called “primitive societies” during the colonization, or with the ethnic immigrant groups, on the occasion of the first immigration waves, materialized in the form of a rather unilateral acculturation, in which the relationship between the majority group and the minority ethnic groups was unequal, and the reduction of the differences was always in favour of the dominant system (ibid.).

One sense of the complex concept of “acculturation” refers to the process of learning the norms, values and behaviours expected by the social and cultural environment that is foreign to someone, individuals and groups alike. Regarding immigrants and immigration issues, the term of acculturation can be used to designate the process of learning the norms, values and behaviours expected by the culture in which the individual/ group immigrated (Chadraba and O’Keefe 2011, 7). Acculturation means, in this context, what is socially and culturally expected from the immigrants who want to settle and stay in the host country, or, in other words, a cultural “adjustment” of minorities (immigrants) to the majority culture.

Over the time, acculturation has manifested itself as an epiphenomenon of conquests, colonisations, subjugations and political and economic

domination (Geană 1993, 18), often having a forced character. In order to depict this imposed nature, the term of “assimilation” was used instead of that of acculturation.

The cultural assimilation, which was the dominant norm in USA until the second half of the 20th century (Gordon 1964; Farley 1982), was understood as unilateral process through which the immigrants and their descendants gave up their culture of origin and fully adopted the culture of the host country (the American one), with everything involved: language, traditions, customs, social structure, behaviours. In Europe, on the other hand, assimilation has become associated as early as the first half of the 20th century with ethnocentrism, cultural oppression, and even with the use of violent means to force minorities to conform, culminating with the Nazi methods. As a reaction to fascism and to extremist slippages of nationalism, to the oppression and even expulsion of minorities, on the one hand, and as a result of increasing of the relevance of human rights, as well as of self-esteem and cultural pride of minorities after World War II, on the other hand, “assimilation” has become a rejected term, even a taboo (Integration and Integration Policies 2006, 11). Therefore, the notion of assimilation has now fallen into disgrace, and the phenomenon to which it refers is politically repudiated due to the new ethical standards adopted in international relations.

At present, however, another vision prevails: instead of imposing to the minority groups the cultural hegemony of the dominant collectivity, there is promoted the recognition of differences, which are valorised as such and integrated in the interactions of social actors (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 335). This process and this perspective are called, at least in some conceptual delimitations (e.g. Blanchet and Francard 2005), “interculturalisation”. In a similar view, but not explicitly speaking about the recognition of differences, but about their awareness, C. Clanet (1998, 70) refers to interculturalisation as the

set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when identifying oneself as being distinct from a cultural point of view.

In practice, interculturalization is a complex and complicated process that involves a series of identity challenges. That is why it is difficult, if not impossible to achieve, because it would need a recognition of the cultural relativism, i.e. a recognition of own cultural limits, and such an acknowledgment is hard to find in practice.

As far as the identification of the social actors is concerned, interculturalization involves more than just a mere juxtaposition of ethnic identities, which would mean an essentialist perspective. It involves rather a negotiation, within some multiple and varied interactions, of some “affinities and oppositions, proximities and distances, in order to constitute a new, identity-bearing reality” (Blanchet and Francard 2005, 335). From this point of view, interculturalization is a challenge, since it involves at least a certain degree of identity fluidity (Camilleri, et al. 2015) and the willingness to accommodate, by which the owners of different cultural luggage find a way to achieve a common form of intercultural regulation (Collès 1994).

Subcultures and countercultures

Nowadays, as a result of the process of globalization and the increasing mobility of people, societies have become complex and diversified. The cultural manifoldness has become an omnipresent phenomenon. In this context, other specific notions are also used to define the surrounding social reality, such as “subculture” and “counterculture”.

Although apparently the notion of “subculture” seems to describe, in a pejorative way, something more “second to” the culture, or a hybrid form in which different styles mix heterogeneously, similar, in many ways, to kitsch, in fact it is an expression of the great cultural diversity existing in any society. It marks the identity of different social groups, characterized by norms, values

and alternative lifestyles, or different from those of the society as a whole. Subcultures are part of a society while keeping their specific characteristics intact.

If we define culture as a way of life, consisting of modes of doing, being and thinking specific to a particular community, subculture is also a way of life characteristic to a certain social group, different from that of other groups. Often, the subculture is understood as a marginal or subordinate section of the dominant culture. Subcultures are most often characterized through oppositional elements, frequently manifested by symbolic forms of resistance (Rădulescu and Ștefănescu 2003, 226).

Thus, subcultures must be firstly related to a “parent” culture, i.e. that culture they are a subset of, but they should be also analyzed in terms of their relations to the dominant culture, in other words relating to the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole (Clarke, et al 1976, 13). According to D. Hebdige (1979), subcultures can be seen as subversions to “normality”, bringing together like-minded individuals who feel neglected by societal standards and allowing them to develop a sense of identity. Given the nature of criticism to the dominant societal standards they manifest, subcultures can be often perceived as negative.

The identity of a subculture may be based on its ethnic heritage, may derive from the economic condition of the group (such as the poor subcultures of the ghettos), or may be defined by region and history (Goodman 2001, 59). Subcultures may be also shaped based on factors of a sexual nature (e.g. different gay subcultures), musical styles (e.g. goth subculture, developed from the audience of gothic rock, as well as hip hop, punk, rave subcultures etc.), cinematic preferences (e.g. “Trekkies” as a subculture of Star Trek fans) or diverse hobbies (e.g. “Bikers” as a subculture of individuals whose primary interest, actions and activities involve motorcycles), etc. In the art, various subcultures have also been distinguished throughout the time, as for example

Dada/Dadaism and Surrealism movements, who promoted radical aesthetic practices, such as collage, “dream work”, “ready made” (Hebdige 2002, 105) as ways of resistance or protest towards the social establishment and the mainstream culture. What is specific to many subcultures in the field of art and music is that, when they occur, they may be considered subcultures in the sense specified above, appearing as radical and completely different from the dominant culture, but within a short period of time they can be encompassed by that, becoming the mainstream taste, as for example through media interest and commercial exploitation of their new, innovative ideas.

Moreover, subcultures can be defined in relation to the deviation from the standard values and norms of the society, this being the case, for example, of subcultures of drug users, but also delinquent and criminal subcultures. The awareness of the group identity can be determined just by the attitudes expressed by the authorities or by the public opinion, as is the case with the subculture of drug users. The preference for drugs makes the individual a stigmatized person, as a result of the social reaction manifested to drugs in most contemporary societies. Such stigmatization forces a person to associate with other individuals defined by the same identity or preferences, and to seek support or guidance in the norms and values of the respective subculture. In this way, the association of individuals practicing similar lifestyles determines the creation of subcultures, which are defined by certain roles and skills, interests, demands, habits, etc. A negative reaction to a subculture, manifested, for example, by stigmatizing its members, can paradoxically strengthen their sense of belonging.

Sociologists view subcultures in two different ways: either as the product of norms and values that are alternative to those of global culture, or as the result of marginal or deviant values, norms and lifestyles in relation to legitimate or conventional ones (Rădulescu and Ștefănescu 2003, 227). Some subcultures are legitimate (e.g. ethnic and religious subcultures), others are

illegitimate or deviant (e.g. criminal subcultures). However, “legitimate” or not, each subculture has its own perceptions, definitions, significations, meanings and focal areas of interest. For example, the subculture of young people has as focal areas of interest leisure, hedonism and nonconformism, and manifests itself as an important element of solidarity in relation to adults (ibid.). The attempt to resist the dominant forces of the society has often taken on musical and dance forms, which are enshrined in subcultures, becoming a symbol of resiliency (Lull 1992). Many modern musical styles originated in young people’s subcultures represent an “anathema” to parents, teachers and, in general, to the existing social rules at a given time (McQuail 1997, 92).

Often, subcultures adopt special ways to stand out, such as spectacular styles of clothing or hairstyles, or striking and unusual actions. All these represent significant forms of response and resistance specific to the subculture the individuals belong to, through specialized subcultural identities and rituals. Therefore, subcultures function to win, or at least to challenge and contest the “cultural space” for their members. In this way, they generate and confirm meaningful ways of both individual and collective identity, as well as a mode of reference towards the dominant values of the wider cultural and social order (O’Sullivan, et al 1997, 308).

Furthermore, a subculture has frequently a distinct language. Marked forms of communication within subcultures confer also a sense of identity, provide the possibility of more precise communication between members of the subgroup, and protect this communication from people outside it. However, the cultural mosaic created by subcultures can be considered a factor of enrichment of the society (Goodman 2001, 59).

In some cases, the cultural patterns of a particular subgroup are not only different, but explicitly contrary to the patterns of the rest of society. The term “counterculture” is often used to designate such phenomena. The countercultures embody ideas, values, norms and lifestyles that are in direct

opposition to those of the larger society (ibid. 60). The “hippie” counterculture, for example, has challenged and bearded, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the fundamental American values of individualism, competition and materialism. This movement was a politicized, largely middle-class, alternative or “revolutionary” youth subculture that protested, opposed and fought against the older establishment on both sides of the Atlantic (O’Sullivan, et al 1997, 66). While countercultures like this can prove themselves, in the long term, progressive for society, other countercultures, such as neo-fascist and neo-Nazi movements, the Ku Klux Klan in the United States or the Muslim fundamentalist groups, who have developed their own sets of cultural patterns that put them in opposition to the cultures of their own societies, are essentially deeply destructive to the society as a whole.

Sometimes, as was the case with the “hippie” movement in the United States of America, counterculture elements are absorbed by the wider cultural framework, and the distinction between the two is blurred (Goodman 2001). In most cases, however, the countercultures remain in opposition, sometimes in conflict, with the larger society.

Currently, many western societies that have received, over time, immigrants, are facing the phenomenon of criminal countercultures that are defined by the national or ethnic origin of their members, immigrants or descendants of the second or third generation of immigrants. Such delinquent countercultures operate according to the structures and rules of organized crime and functionate according to the principles of clans and large criminal mafia families.

Conclusions

At present, cultural diversity characterizes most societies. Cultural contacts and exchanges, as well as cultural impact in case of the social restructuring as a result of migration and social mobility, are currently

themes often addressed in social sciences. Various approaches and discussions as regards social and cultural diversity conceptualize this problematic through terms such as multiculturalism, interculturality, interculturalisation and so on.

While the concept of multiculturalism, as well as the alternative notion of multiculturality, emphasize the coexistence in a society of several different cultures, the term interculturality indicates rather the asymmetrical relations that exist within a society between the majority and the minority constellations in terms of culture, as there are, in fact, unequal power relations between them also from a political, economic and social point of view. To describe the cultural processes through which ethnic groups of immigrants have passed, over time, terms such as acculturation and cultural assimilation have been used, the first with reference to the process of learning the norms, values and behaviours expected by the new social and cultural environment, and the second with reference to giving up the culture of origin and fully adopting the culture of the host country.

However, at present another vision prevails, namely instead of imposing the cultural hegemony of the dominant collectivity to the minority groups, there is promoted the recognition of differences, which are valorised as such and integrated in the interactions of social actors. This phenomenon, named interculturalisation, which in practice is complex and complicated, because presupposes a series of identitarian challenges, involves processes by which individuals and groups interact when identifying oneself as being distinct from a cultural point of view. Thus, interculturalisation requires interactions and negotiations, but also a certain degree of identity fluidity and the willingness to achieve a common form of intercultural regulation.

But not only the societies that recently received new waves of immigrants face cultural challenges. In all societies there exist to a certain degree cultural manifoldness, subcultures and countercultures. As it has been stated above, subcultures can shape themselves in a society based on different

criteria, such as ethnic heritage, region, history, economic condition, sexual identities, but also art, music styles or hobbies. Moreover, there exist subcultures that can be defined in relation to the illegitimate deviation from the standard values and norms of the society, this being the case of criminal and delinquent subcultures, and the drug users' ones.

Whatever the criteria for defining for a subculture, whether legitimate or illegitimate, and whatever the ways of identifying of their members, all subcultures are related to a "parent" culture and are considered in terms of their relations to the dominant culture and the mainstream trends. Subcultures can be viewed either as the product of values and norms that are alternative to those of global culture, or as the result of marginal or deviant norms, values, and lifestyles in relation to the legitimate or conventional ones.

Sometimes, the cultural patterns of some particular subgroups are not only different, but explicitly contrary to the patterns of the rest of society. In this case, the term of counterculture is used to describe the phenomenon of adoption by some groups of ideas, values, norms and lifestyles that are in direct opposition to those of the larger society. At times some countercultures may prove revolutionary, or they may contribute to society's progress and changing the status quo, but more often countercultures are deeply negative and destructive to society, as is the case with criminal clans, organized crime, and the radical, extremist and fundamentalist countercultures.

Beyond the last-mentioned types of countercultures, which are rather exceptions, the cultural diversity and the broad mosaic created by subcultures can be considered factors of enrichment within a society.

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